

Wandering Through the Years

By

Freda M Hartley

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A

Story of Family Life

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.....

Dedicated with affection to my Children

and

Grandchildren

.....

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TYPED BY
JEANNETTE MC KENZIE
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Wandering Through the Years

Foreword

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When in the Autumn of 1899, my cousin Margaret and I rambled in the less frequented spots of New Plymouth, we found our way one day, to the Cemetery in which my grandmother, Joy Brown, and her baby son were sleeping.

No one would then have believed that Major Brown would be lying beside them in a little over a year from that time. He was in his 81st year; his back as straight as the proverbial poker, and he was as alert and quick-witted as a man in early middle life. His wit was as keen as a rapier and his fund of short stories, I was told later, would have been a great asset to any clergyman at a Clerical Meeting.

As my cousin and I wandered under the shady trees and round the graves of some of the leading citizens of early Taranaki, I was interested to see so many names of those of whom my mother had so often spoken in her far-away homes in the Far North.

We thought as we wandered along that, with a little care, God's Acre would be a beautiful retreat for lonely people, or those with hearts saddened by the loss of a near and dear one.

Some by-gone traveller once spoke of Taranaki as "God's Garden", and I feel sure that were I able to return to that beautiful city, I would find that cemetery treasured among the many exquisite and delightful spots that form a pleasing memorial to the citizens of New Plymouth's interesting Past.

I must say "Thankyou" to the sub-editor of the Christchurch Star-Sun for so kindly furnishing me with the true facts of the Marching Maoris after they had passed through Waima, and of the gunboat Torch; the Government steamers Tutanekai and Hinemoa, with the correct number of the Permanent Force that was dispatched, and the names of the guns they brought with them. Through the years I had forgotten those most important details.

My daughter, Patricia, prepared the Family Tree for publication as she has had a great deal of experience in preparing historical records; and the other members of the family, though equally interested, are married and settled elsewhere.

November 20th 1955.

Freda M Hartley

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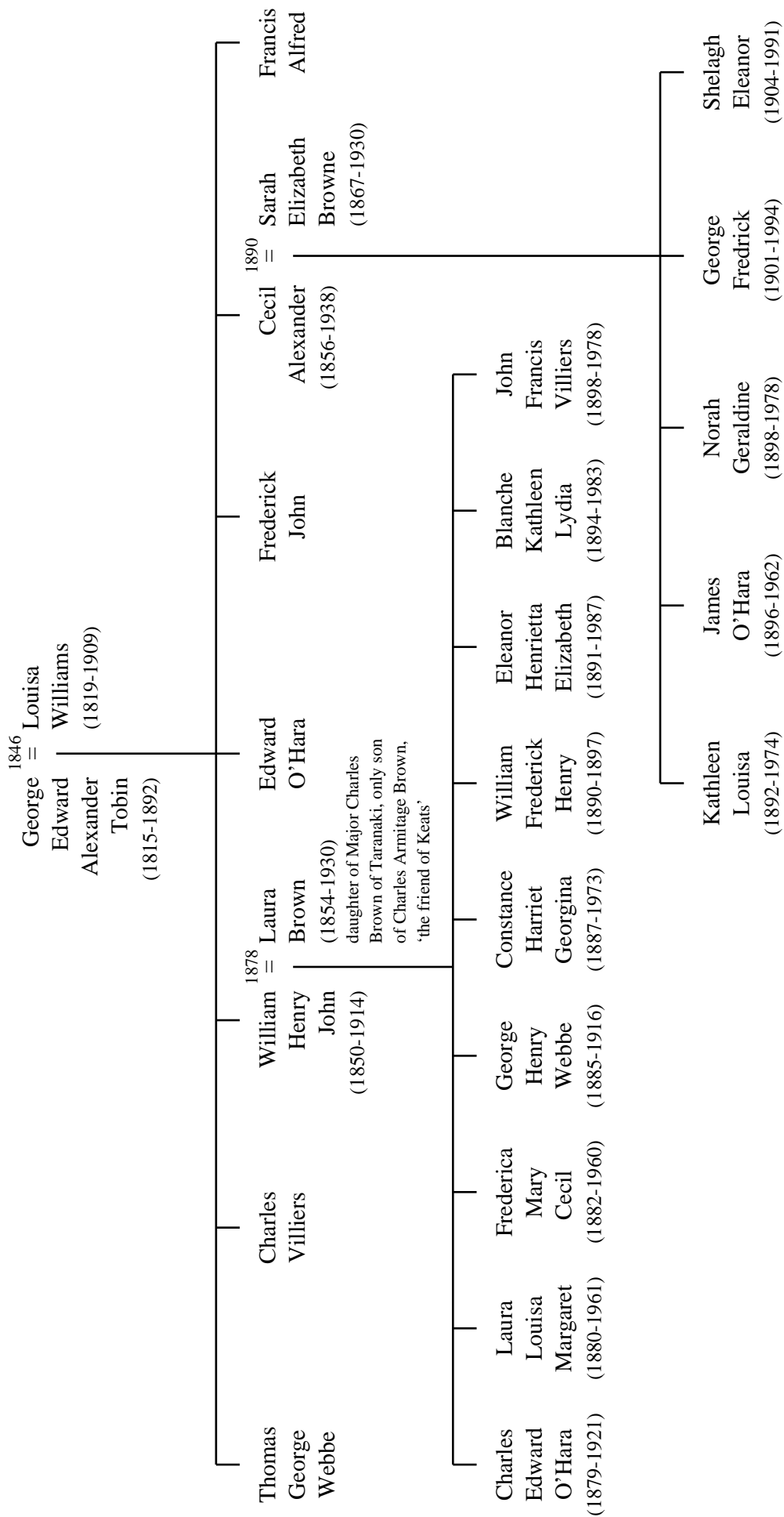
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Extract from the Tobin family tree

Brothers William H. J. & Cecil A. Tobin immigrated to New Zealand in the late 1870s



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Early in 1877 William Henry John Tobin, a cadet of an old Devonshire family, went to Taranaki, New Zealand, in search of remunerative and open-air work.

He had left England where his mother lived at Exmouth, Devon, to take up a post in the Civil Service in India.

His father's regiment was stationed in India, and he hoped to see something of him while there. Enjoying the life immensely he stayed several years, only leaving because a friend was going out to Australia in search of adventures in a young country, William resigned his post and the two young men left together.

His father had private means and gave each of his sons a good allowance. William took a room at a large hotel in Sydney and began to enjoy himself. He and his friend felt that all life lay before them and they travelled about to other Australian cities and towns to see as much of Australian customs and scenery as they could.

I forget the name of his friend but think it was Holden, as one of that name crossed to New Zealand after him; joined him in Wellington for a while, and later went to Gisborne to live.

After some months, William received a letter from his father saying that an English railway in which most of his money was invested had failed; William's allowance would be discontinued until affairs were straightened and William must support himself until time had shown what securities were safe. Poor young man, he had been spending freely. After counting his money he discovered he had only enough to pay his hotel expenses and to take him to Lyttelton....single fare. His friend was waiting for his cheque from Home, so he promised to follow William by the next boat.

William could not contemplate staying in Sydney where he had been spending money like a lord, as the saying is, so he caught the first boat and came across the Tasman to New Zealand. A coastal boat brought him from Wellington to Lyttelton where he landed with his luggage and some loose change in his pocket.

It is greatly to his credit, as he was a mere lad of twentytwo, that he made up his mind to take the first work offering, no matter what it happened to be.

Speaking to an elderly passenger as he left the gangway William mentioned that he had travelled from Australia to look for work. The elderly man looked at him appraisingly then asked abruptly, "Indoor or out?"

William replied quickly, "Out if possible."

The stranger pointed to a small office near the wharf. "Try at that office," he said. "It is run by some wealthy run-holders so that they can pick up promising workers from overseas boats."

William thanked him, and after a few words they parted. The stranger went on his way while William entered the door of the office.

The result was that William was engaged as a shepherd on the Teschemaker's run in South Canterbury. He could ride well but knew nothing about sheep. He must have satisfied the manager because he remained on the run a little over two years.

When we, his family, were young he thrilled us by telling of his hairbreadth escapes from harm when mustering on some of the difficult shaley slopes crowding the mountainous parts of the run. He talked about leading his horse down deep ravines and steep gullies with the track almost straight up and down, exciting our imaginations.

When his adventurous spirit was depressed by the monotonous life he wrote in answer to an advertisement and obtained a clerical position in a Government office in Wellington.

There he worked for some considerable time and made a number of

interesting acquaintances in that young town. One other adventurous soul was always trying to persuade him to take an outside position where they could work together.

One day, at the weekend, when they were waiting for a train to take them into the country for the day, the two young men saw a large advertisement being tacked up at the railway station.

It called in glowing terms for "Bush whackers," the 1870 term for bushmen. So at the end of the month they packed up and set off for Stratford, Taranaki.

At that time that little township was in its infancy. As great forest giants were felled and cut up in the saw-pits, cottages were erected speedily on the cleared sections and streets were formed. It was nothing to see huge forest stumps in small plots where settlers were erecting their homes and other stumps waiting to be pulled out while streets were being formed around them. There were large forests of giants, centuries old, surrounding Stratford and extending for miles. William and his friend had no difficulty in joining up with a large party of men who held a large Government contract.

On wet days, or on an occasional Sunday, the two young men would go into the township where a Mr George Curtis and his brothers took them to their home and introduced them to their friends. The young men's father had several shops in the rising township and was rapidly becoming a man of importance.

George Curtis and William were about the same age and during holidays were practically inseparable.

The young adventurous fellow, whose name I have long forgotten, was captured by the bright laughing eyes of a cousin of the Curtis family and they and the other brother of George spent all their spare time in riding the bush tracks, or at gay little entertainments got up by some of the townspeople.

People had to make their own pleasures then and many homes took turns in holding a card party or a musical evening where the guests had their share in entertaining the company.

William, at his Public School in England, had been compelled to learn whole poems by heart, and long passages from Shakespeare, so he was soon a very welcome guest at those parties.

Even in his old age in the mid 1900's he could repeat pages from the works of Shelley, Keats and many other poets.

"Bill," said George one day as they were riding along a bush track that was lined by moss and ferns, with trailing creepers clinging to the boughs of trees that towered far above the riders, "I know just the girl for you. I have known her most of my life. You'd both make a grand pair."

He told William that the girl he spoke about was the second daughter of Major Charles Brown, Superintendent of Taranaki, with other irons in the fire. George said she was the belle of Taranaki balls, a very beautiful girl and very sweet natured.

Bill, of Scottish extraction on his mother's side, hummed and ha'ed and said they had better not rush things.

With a twinkle in his blue eyes he said "There is plenty of time before I want to think of settling down."

"You won't think so when you meet her," retorted George. "You will fall head over heels in love and try to rush her off her feet."

"What about your own feelings in the matter?" asked William.

George laughed shortly, "Oh, she looks upon me as "good old George".. Very useful to escort her home. But for anything else, nothing doing."

William changed the subject then and spoke of other matters. When alone he often thought about the beautiful girl who lived almost under the shadow of lofty Mt Egmont.

Some months later the two young men went up to the New Plymouth Jockey Club races. They were keenly excited and hoped for fine weather.

At this time Major Brown kept a fairly big stable and ran some very good horses on the race tracks. His second daughter, Laura, was a splendid little horsewoman having been used to accompanying her

father over the province in the course of his duties as superintendent. She often tried out his racers and on race days rode one that was not in the racing programme.

With a gay party of mixed sexes on horseback, she rode round the course and generally enjoyed herself in the racing intervals.

This special race day she was riding with a party of young people, and, ahead of the others, she was delighting in a sweet handgallop when a young man began to move across the course just in front of her horse as she turned into the straight.

She pulled up just in time as the young man jumped quickly out of her way. Flushing, he raised his hat as he passed on.

Laura thought "Oh, what a very handsome young man. I wonder who he is, and where he comes from."

She waited for the rest of the riding party to join her, all the time quietly determined to find out all she could about the young man as she had never taken a fancy to a stranger before. She was certain that he was her fate.

That night, dressing for the ball that wound up the racing festivities, she was filled with a vivid excitement that heightened her beauty and caused her lovely eyes to sparkle at the thought of the handsome stranger.

At the same time in their room at the hotel, George said to William, "Tobin, tonight you meet your fate!"

William blushed uneasily and made some hasty remark to cover his embarrassment. He did not wish to meet any Miss Brown that evening. He fervently hoped that the divinity of the race course would be present. Her beautiful face seemed to haunt his quiet moments.

It happened later that the young crowd that William was with were telling him the names of those to whom he must refuse to be introduced. There were quite a number scattered through the province of very doubtful virtue, but belonging to moneyed homes. One girl's name was not unlike the name 'Brown', if indistinctly heard, William was, of course, determined to see that she was not palmed off on him by some practical joker.

Laura and the Hempton girls were standing under some lovely floral decorations as William and George strolled along. George said in a low voice, "Tobin, come, and I will introduce you to Miss Brown."

William, mistaking the name, said stiffly, "No thanks, George. I'd rather be excused."

Laura was quite close as they passed, with her back turned to them. She heard the low remarks quite clearly and thought with a toss of her haughty head, "If that is George's wonderful friend he will have to crawl to get an introduction now!"

George, by the way, had often spoken to her of his English friend and said how much he wished they would meet some day.

It took George some weeks to unravel the mystery as to why Laura had said later in the evening that she did not wish to meet his friend. His earliest chance to bring them together was at a mass picnic held at the "Meeting of the Waters," a few months later. From that time the friendship flourished at a great rate.

Laura and William never forgot sitting that day on the bank of the idly flowing river that ran between bush-covered banks. As they talked, Laura took off her shady hat and laid it on the grass between them.

"That's a pretty hat!" said William, absentmindedly pulling off a flower from a wreath encircling the crown.

"Naughty, naughty!" exclaimed Laura lightly, "We'll have to make a grave and bury the poor dear flower, as it won't be any good for the hat now."

William agreed. With a sharp stick lying near by he dug a small hole beside them and they both buried it beneath the mossy soil.

Some time later, when Laura suggested that it was time to return to the spot where the chaperones were enjoying a good gossip, William looked at her with an apologetic grin, "I say, I am sorry. Look how we have both spoilt your pretty hat," he said, twirling it round with one hand.

Laura looked and gave a confused little laugh. In the rapturous

interest of their first long conversation together, they had stripped every flower from among the leaves on the wreath. A number of little graves were nestling round the first little floral victim.

"That just shows how absentmindedly people can do things with their hands when their minds are occupied with more important things." William said, as they took one last look at the beauty of the winding river in its green setting, before retracing their steps to the luncheon ground.

CHAPTER TWO

They were married at the little church at Te Henui on June 1st, 1878. Before William proposed to Laura, he had applied to the Secretary of the Education Department at Wellington for a position in one of their schools. He had not wished to beard her father while he was still "bush whacking."

Having been a Public School boy in England and with most excellent educational credentials he was given a position at once. For two years William taught at a school in a small township called Waitara.

Six months after Laura's marriage Major Brown had married a young Taranaki woman who was about twenty six years younger than he was. His first wife had died when Laura was only sixteen years of age. His second wife presented him with a daughter six months after Laura's first child, a son, was born, Charles Edward O'Hara.

Laura had gone to her father's home to be confined and enjoyed being under her father's roof again, as she loved the large and rambling house. Her stepmother was very kind and William came in at the weekend and stayed.

The same thing happened when Louisa was born and within the year Mrs Brown presented the Major with a fine pair of twins - boys.

When Freda was born her parents were living at a little farm some distance from New Plymouth. The place belonged to the Major, so he allowed the young couple the use of the farmhouse when William was appointed to a New Plymouth school. The farm was rented by a farmer who worked it in with his own place.

The farm was called Ratanui because some big rata trees grew in great numbers there, William rode into the town every day to take his classes.

Then the Maoris began to give trouble. They were dissatisfied with the reply of the Government to their demands for a change in the Maori Land Regulations.

As no notice was taken of their complaints, a party of Maoris would take ploughs and go to an isolated farm belonging to a white settler. There they would plough up all the crops - the farm workers hiding with the owners for fear of worse befalling them. One farmer said that it was most alarming to see a huge gathering of Maori warriors coming in through the farm gates. They danced hakas and shouted war cries before beginning to work havoc on the crops. They did not go near the homestead, nor the farm buildings, but contented themselves by shouting war cries as they left to go to another farm.

An aside....I was the third child and before I arrived my mother was in a very jittery state as the Maoris were assembling all over Taranaki and ploughing up crops everywhere. My father was approached by a body of settlers who asked him if he would drill them one night each week. They had been advised by Major Brown to approach him as he had belonged to a military family at Home, and the Major did not know anyone as capable as William.

My father did not like to disappoint his father-in-law so he told the deputation that he was only too glad to help, and arranged for drill night to be each Tuesday evening. They were to assemble at an agreed place of meeting, and all drilling was to be over in time to allow each man to reach his home by ten o'clock.

In that way the wives and families would not be left long without their protectors.

Little bands of militia men sprang up all over Taranaki and men drilled diligently in case of further trouble with the Maoris.

I remember my mother saying that she used to be very frightened as soon as Tuesday evening approached. She knew that William would be away during the early hours of the evening and she dreaded being alone with two young children. Being a soldier's daughter she kept her fears to herself and hoped that her husband imagined her to be a very courageous young woman.

Just before he left for the drill shed, my father always brought out a pair of pistols which he had brought from England.

"They are ready for you, my dear. You know what to do if the Maoris surround the house?"

"Yes, William, she would reply, "I shall be very careful. It is you I shall worry about."

"My brave little woman!" he said, embracing her. "Do not open the door until you hear my special knocks. I will try to be home at ten if not just before."

Mother said that she used to lock the doors directly he left, and she then saw that the windows were fastened and closely covered by the blinds and curtains.

Then she waited feverishly for the hours to pass, straining her ears for noises outside the walls. When the three knocks were heard she rushed to the door and admitted my father. All was then well with her world.

This went on to the time of my birth and much longer. I have wondered at the impression her frightened thoughts left on the mind of an unborn child. Never in all my life have I been able to stay alone in a house without covering every window carefully so as to leave no peephole. Also I was never free from fear of what may happen before the clock struck ten. No matter how I fought the feeling it was the same when night fell. At ten, all fear left me and I have been able to go out and wander in the garden or on a lonely hillside enjoying the peace and beauty of the evening hours. But never before ten o'clock unless I had a companion, and that, of course, was a different matter.

It was a relief to the people of Taranaki when the trouble was settled. Blunderbusses were oiled and put away and the whole province settled down to enjoy a peaceful existence.

In those early days of school teaching, committees possessed a great deal of authority, or assumed it. It was nothing for a Headmaster to have a visit from a committeeman during school hours, or one would expect to sit in the room and criticize the way a lesson was given.

William and other teachers were most annoyed about this and often discussed the subject together. They knew it would do no good if they approached the school inspectors, and if complaints were forwarded to the Head Office the departmental officers apparently pigeonholed the complaints and forgot all about them.

William used to say that he would not take criticism from men who did not know "B" from a bull's foot.

"Why, he said, "I do not believe that more than one or two of the Committee have even attended a school in their lives. They drop their aitches everywhere besides being extremely common in their speech. I am not blaming them for that, because they probably could not help their lack of schooling and do not know that when they open their mouths they immediately put their feet into them. But I do object to men like that being, as they imagine, in a position to teach me my own business."

That was the sentiment of a number of other teachers who suffered from the officious members of their committees.

The Native Affairs Department, Wellington, was at that time advertising for young and well-educated men for a number of schools that were being built in the Far North of New Zealand. They required only married men.

William, with several other eager young teachers, filled in application forms at once.

"Now that we have cut our chains, Laura," William said gaily as he entered the house that afternoon, "it won't be long before we get our marching orders."

"I am sure I am not anxious to leave Taranaki" said Laura regretfully, "this has always been my home, and all our friends live here."

"Never mind that, Sweet," he replied encouragingly, taking her into his arms. "Don't forget that you promised to forsake all others and follow me to the end of the world. There will be many sick Maoris to doctor. That will be part of your job. It will be an entirely new life for us."

Laura remembered that she had often stayed with her Uncle's family in the Wairarapa. He was Dr Spratt who often used to call her into the surgery to make up powders for him, or fill small bottles with castor oil and other simple remedies.

She remembered when one wealthy woman had exasperated him by constantly sending for him or going to the surgery where ^{he} had much on his hands owing to an epidemic of measles. He had assured her over and over again that she had nothing the matter with her. She declared that she felt decidedly off colour. As she looked the picture of good health he looked thoughtful, and then said he would give her some pills which she must be careful to take according to instructions. She would feel happier then.

Dr Spratt then said to his niece who was helping him that afternoon, "There's that wretched woman back again! She's bursting with good health and just wasting valuable time. Laura, there's a good girl, take this piece of harmless soap, get some brown sugar and roll up two dozen pills very carefully. Very small pills remember. They won't hurt her and I can't prescribe medicine with a capital 'M'. She doesn't need it."

Laura had giggled as she prepared her corner of the surgery bench, "They won't be very nice tasting, Uncle," she exclaimed.

"I don't intend them to be. Anything to keep her quiet until my other patients are on their feet again. She'll stay away until she finishes the pills."

Laura made some neat and rather attractive looking little pills and packed them up neatly. Then she labelled them "One to be taken three times daily."

She never heard any more about the rich woman because she returned to New Plymouth a few days later.

Laura repeated this tale to William as she prepared a salad for their dinner and put some vegetables on the stove. He sat on the windowseat watching her, while he filled his pipe. "That was quite amusing, Love," he said, "but hardly an ethical thing to do, I'm afraid. Those wealthy old dames must be an awful nuisance to a doctor when so disgustingly healthy and wishing to appear the opposite. They love to be in the limelight."

"Well, I'd hardly call it disgusting to be healthy, William," said Laura with a disapproving little pout.

"They must think it so when they would love to have some ailment to grizzle over. Of course it is sometimes a doctor's fault when he is young and handsome and tied to his work. It would be the only way for them to be noticed by him, I suppose."

"That may be the reason, I suppose, though I never thought Uncle very handsome. He had a beard that he was very proud of but I could never stand a beard on anyone - except my Dad. There were several old, or elderly women, who had ever so much money," said Laura, looking back into her girlhood days. "They looked the picture of health and were always coming to the surgery. I used to pity poor Uncle when they were on the war-path. They rolled their eyes and simpered, pretending to be quite young."

"Here, let's chop that parsley while you do something else," exclaimed William, taking the little chopper from her. "How did you manage to see all that? I thought the doctor and his patient would be safely away from little inquisitive girls."

Laura laughed. "I used to take the surgery duties so many times a week to let Nell or Moll go out with their mother. If one of them came, she

treated me haughtily as though I were about ten years of age - but Oh! How coy she became as soon as she saw Uncle, - she'd flutter and simper until I determined to be different when I grew up."

William gave a boyish grin, "Don't begin it in later life," he teased. "Well, this is done, is there anything else I can help you with?"

"No, dear, thankyou. You've done your day's work when you see the last of your pupils."

"Well, I'll go and turn out some of our private papers and sort them. It will be a case of getting everything done as we go along. When I get posted we will have to be up and off. Goodbye, all good friends," and William went whistling from the room.

Laura looked tenderly after him. "I'd rather that he had wandering feet than salt in his veins as many of the people seem to have. We can be together if he wanders on land," she thought, "and that is more than a naval man's wife can say."

Chapter Three

Life was very busy for poor Laura just then. The babe was only a few weeks old and needing care and attention. While William was in town each day, Laura sorted, discarded and packed everything that was not needed at the moment.

Friends ran in and out exclaiming every few moments that New Plymouth would not be worth living in when Laura left. Sometimes some of the girls spent the day with her, helping to pack, and doing other things to leave her time to get their things ready for the sea-trip. Laura used to laugh sometimes as she could not have worked harder if she intended to travel round the world.

One day William produced an official letter. His application had been accepted by the Native Affairs Department. He was told that the Manganui school in the Far North had just been completed and that he was appointed Headmaster.

His wife would be informed at a later date of her duties as sewing mistress. Sometimes it would be necessary for her to take an occasional class as well, to relieve the pressure on his time.

There was an official slip enclosed which gave a list of safe and everyday remedies that he would need to stock up with, as the Maori settlement would be under his care and he would have to watch the health of young and old.

Incidentally, that expense came out of the teacher's pocket. Many years passed before one teacher rebelled and sent in a claim for all the monies spent on medicines, bandages, ointments and various things used through the year. Pay was very small and the upkeep of the medicine chest was a heavy burden on the shoulders of the teachers. There was a great deal of sickness through the winter months. Maoris were learning to dress as their white brothers and sisters did but made many mistakes while learning, and their natural good health suffered. For instance, they would put on European clothing when they went about their daily work. If a storm surprised them and they got drenched they would go back to their homes and crouch over the fire until their clothes began to steam and dry. Chest complaints and rheumatism were among the many illnesses that a teacher had to treat during the year. He also had to teach the rules of health and how to wear their strange clothing to suit the different seasons.

This extra strain placed upon the Native school teacher was a heavy one, and ^{one} that was faithfully carried out in most cases. In those days there was no consideration given for the time spent by the teachers and their wives in watching the health of the Maoris.

Then, as now, teachers were one of the few workers who received no overtime no matter how much of their own time in that day was spent in doctoring the sick, and in watching the health of the Maoris. Nowadays of course, the Social Security Scheme caters for the health of all

European, Maori, and every other nationality, and the wherewithall comes by taxation from all.

Looking back upon those faraway days in the eighteen-eighties and eighteen-nineties one thinks of the teachers and their wives as an earnest band of missionaries unrecognised as such but spending much of their lives in caring for the health of their Maori friends around them. They were ready to answer a call for help at any time of the day or night. It was nothing unusual for William to hear a Maori knock on his bedroom window during the night and a voice imploring him to come to the aid of some poor sufferer.

The settlements were not always near to the school buildings and grounds. Sometimes they were anything from a mile to three miles away. Hearing a knock and the agitated voice of the caller, William and Laura would hurriedly dress and find out what was wrong. Then William would get out his "Doctor's Book" and absorb a little advice, while Laura went round tucking in the sleeping children and seeing that there were no embers in the grate.

They never locked the doors or windows. In nearly all their lives near Maori settlements until he approached his retiring years William never found it necessary to lock any of his doors. Nothing was ever touched either in the house or garden. Any dishonesty that crept in to the morals of the Maori race came in later days from dishonest white companions.

Like many Irish they were improvident in earlier times but possessing a rare charm and natural dignity that had to be seen to be appreciated.

But this is racing ahead and must be curbed....

Many friends saw William and Laura off from the Port when they left New Plymouth. The babe looked around as babies will but the two older children were able to enjoy the change and received much admiration everywhere for their behaviour and laughing ways.

The boat trip even over the bar at Onehunga was very comfortable and the weather was calm. When the boat berthed William lost no time in seeing that all his goods and chattels were stored in the wharf goods shed. Their personal luggage was stacked around them while they waited for the promised conveyance.

In order to journey to Manganui they had to await the arrival of the coastal boat from that distant northern port. In Auckland they had an invitation for their stay at the residence of Laura's grandparents, Dr and Mrs Horne, of Fernbank, St George's Bay Road, Parnell. The doctor had arranged for his carriage to pick them up on their arrival at the town station.

Laura and William, with the children, had to stay in Parnell for nearly three weeks. Old Dr Horne and his wife with their two youngest daughters, Mary and Constance, lived a very gay life. Parnell society prided itself upon its exclusiveness, and Mary and Constance were much sought after for their bright ways and musical appreciation and execution.

The Horne's eldest daughter, Joy, had married Major Brown in the eighteen-fifties. Her sister Julie, married a sheepfarmer called Farmer some years later. There was a large gap between Julie and Mary and the latter, with Constance, were aunts in their early teens.

The aging grandparents make a great fuss over the little grandchildren while Mary and Constance were primly kind although they openly said that they were really not very fond of young children. Laura used to think then of the time when she was not very fond of her two maiden aunts. She remembered the time, years ago, that she and her younger sister, Jessie, had been sent up from New Plymouth to spend a holiday with their grandparents. Mr and Mrs Farmer were staying there at the same time with four or five children.

It was at the time that the Duke of Edinburgh visited Auckland in 1968. The Hornes were among some of the leading families who entertained the Duke. Some days after he had been entertained at Fernbank, he called one afternoon.

Delighted with the children who were playing about the garden, the Duke told his coachman to fill the carriage with them and take them for about half an hour's drive around Parnell.

When the carriage returned to the front gates, the children hung around the coachman telling him tales of their school and holidays. Laura and Jessie, feeling shy, both raced up the drive and entered the front door as the Duke was being shown out. He asked Laura how she had enjoyed the drive, and then, noticing little Jessie run behind the door and hide, he made a grab at her and kissed the blushing child while the grown-ups showed their amusement by laughing. It was Jessie's fond boast in after years that she had been kissed by the Duke of Edinburgh in eighteen-sixty-eight.

After a merry holiday at Fernbank William and Laura landed in Mangonui early one May morning when the air was delightfully cool and sweet. They were enjoying an Indian summer in Auckland and the cool air struck them very pleasantly. Some Europeans and a number of Maoris watched the passengers come down the gangway.

An old Maori man came up to William and said in an apologetic manner, "You the master for the Native school?"

William looked at the old man who had a frank and open face and was dressed in a neat but shabby suit. "Yes," he replied. "Why do you ask? Are you one of my committee men?"

The old man nodded vigorously. He looked curiously at Laura and the children and then at the luggage that was being put down beside them.

"Me got the cart, Sir. Take you and the Missus and the small goods, then come back for the big fellers."

William thanked him and asked Laura to follow the old man while he picked up some of the baggage.

Between them the white and the Maori men put Laura in the back of the cart. They saw that she and the little ones were carefully seated on some sacking on the floor of the cart, before they brought the rest of the personal luggage. The furniture and boxes would be unshipped later, the Maori man told William and that he and the other committee men would cart it up to the schoolhouse as soon as it was on the wharf.

The strong old cart horse jogged along the rough road which was rutted and stony. William sat on the plank seat beside the driver who said his name was Moses. He told them that the Maoris were impatiently awaiting their arrival.

The school and house were some distance inland. The road ran through some beautiful native bush and alongside a little stream whose shallow waters sang a tuneful song as they rippled over their pebbly bed. The two wee children were very interested in everything^{and} they kept Laura busy replying to their many curious questions.

The babe lay quietly on the bed that they had made for her on some travelling rugs and cushions.

The bush thinned out and the cart drove round some swampy ground and a big swamp where they saw a wild duck swimming with some younger ducks. William commented upon the unusual sight of seeing young ducks at that time of year, but the driver shrugged his shoulders and replied that it must have been a late sitting. There were many more flying over the water as they drove along and the children watched them with excited cries.

The road had turned and twisted until it began to run uphill. The old man pulled the horse to a stop when they reached the top. He pointed to some whares bordering the road beyond, behind them were stake-fenced paddocks where the Maoris grew their corn, potatoes, kumaras and pumpkins.

"They are very neat and the gardens look very well," said William, "but I do not see any school buildings. Have we far to go?"

"Not long now" answered the old man. "When we go round the trees you see the school house." Then he added, "You like it, I know."

"Then this is the settlement from where my pupils come to school?" asked William, thinking that he had been misled and that the attendance at school would be a very small one.

The old man gave a laughing grunt of dissent. "No, this small lot. The Maori pah on past your place. Big Pah, and plenty tamariki" (children).

That relieved William's mind. The teachers were paid so much for each child attending school and a fixed and small sum for each pupil that passed from one standard to another. School inspectors went from school to school and spent one or more days examining the children. The time an inspector spent at each school depended on the number attending it.

Teachers encountered many difficulties when preparing pupils for the higher standards. The youngsters entered at five years of age without knowing more of the English language than one or two words, and those, more often than not, an expletive. It exasperated teachers sometimes to see how little the inspectors took that fact into account when holding an examination.

Fortunately for William he did not know the many trials and tribulations they would meet with in their new way of life. He and Laura both entered it gaily, with hope in their hearts and the knowledge that whatever they encountered in the way of difficulties could be borne, if they looked upon their work as their mission in life.

CHAPTER FOUR

William found the work in a Native school very different from teaching in a Board school. The settlement children had never been to school and very few could speak a word of English. He had to begin from the beginning with every child, big and small, starting from scratch, and it was surprising to find how readily most of the children absorbed the school lessons. It was not long before he began to grade the children into different classes and towards the end of the first year that William was there, he was very pleased with their progress.

Laura took the sewing and helped with the junior classes. When the inspector arrived during the middle of the last term he was agreeably surprised and said that by that time next year he would hold the usual examinations.

As the school increased in numbers it would be necessary to appoint an infant mistress. He asked Laura if she would be prepared to undertake the work.

"I think I should enjoy it," said Laura. "My own children are not very much trouble and it is not as if there was any social life in the place. It would be something useful to do, and I'm sure to find it interesting."

So it was arranged and when the numbers rose beyond the figure set for one teacher to handle, Laura stepped into the work as easily as she had stepped into marriage and the rearing of her little ones.

William was very proud of his capable little wife who had never been accustomed to doing anything up to the time of their marriage beyond pottering around her Father's garden at Te Henui - a very beautiful garden - and in helping to entertain the many guests who frequented "The Pines."

In those early days in Taranaki people who could afford to have help in the house were never at a loss for capable and hard working girls. The emigrant ships brought out many Poles and Germans who were only too glad to take any work that was offering. The daughters of those new settlers were eagerly snapped up by the local people who found them very excellent workers.

"The Pines" being a one-storied home of thirtyeight rooms, built like the capital "L" - they never had less than two girls in the kitchen, besides an experienced cook.

Some of the Maori children were very attractive, both girls and boys. As a rule, the girls carried their looks into their twenties when, some of them were devastatingly pretty. That accounted for many men who had come out from the British Isles, and who found their way to the North Auckland shores, marrying Maori girls and often living happily ever after.

It was not uncommon to hear of a well-born Englishman, or from the sister isles, marrying a Maori girl for the second or third time if he lost the earlier wives by death or disaster. Many half-castes were very clever and talented, besides having the good looks and fine carriage of both races.

Laura grew very fond of the small children in her junior classes and often said how enchanted she was with their pretty manners and sayings.

To get stores, William rode to the port where there were some houses along the shore. Laura was told later, that the womenfolk had watched their every movement when they first arrived. They sat behind the varicoloured curtains shrouding the windows facing the road, and were most interested in all they did.

They had later discovered that a big shabby building went by the name of "The Pub" as the owners catered for the travelling public. The 'Post and Telegraph' offices were part of the same building.

There was a general store which sold everything from a packet of needles to a farm plough. If one did not wish to call at "The Pub" for a cup of tea, or some soft drinks which they supplied at any hour, then it was possible to enter the large store and enjoy a pleasant chat with the storekeeper, or his energetic wife serving behind the dress counter. Some of the local people were sure to have an errand at the store if they saw a stranger enter the building.

In that way, William met many of the local white settlers and their wives, and some that he found congenial soon found their way to the schoolhouse, and several interesting friendships were formed.

At the Post Office mail days depended upon the mail arriving by an odd coastal steamer, or by a mailman who rode overland and led a pack-horse which carried mail for miles around.

It was a great event when a boat called at the port and dropped a mail-bag or two, and perhaps only the next day the mailman arrived with another consignment.

Laura and William loved the days when the mail arrived. They received many papers and magazines from Taranaki, and from England, besides mail from his eldest brother who was at that time Head Inspector of the Indian police force, and brothers in other parts of the world. Laura had many correspondents as well, so letters arrived by every mail day. The 'Auckland Weekly News' first printed in eighteen-sixty-four, was the paper most eagerly watched for by Northern people. It had a correspondent in nearly every district and so contained such local as well as the news of the week. Now in the nineteen fifties known as the "Weekly News" it is still acknowledged to be the leading paper in many districts but has lost the local touch as the day of the small correspondent seems to have gone. Local news is dear to the heart of everyone, and it will be a sorry day for New Zealand when one has to receive most of the news of the country from the radio standing on the shelf.

Major Brown wrote constantly, and forwarded many parcels of seeds and bulbs for their garden. He subscribed to gardening journals in the U.K and the U.S.A, and sent them on to William and Laura so they learnt many new methods of planting.

Although William had known nothing about gardening when he married, he had bought a gardening manual and garden tools. It was not long before they both had a flourishing garden at their first Northern school. He dug the ground and prepared it while Laura planted the small seeds, leaving him the potatoes and other root vegetables to see to in his spare time. So they kept their gardening activities right through their lives together. A white settler supplied them with two quarts of milk every day for

the small sum of two shillings a week.

William urged the farmer to charge more but he refused by saying, "If your children don't drink it, I'll have to throw it to the pigs and they get more than enough."

Laura and William knew that the milk was of a very high quality and did not like taking it for practically nothing, so they contented themselves by sending over a basket of mixed vegetables twice a week.

In April that year George Henry Webbe arrived. Laura had cooked a hot dinner after school came out and was just going to sit down and enjoy her share when she had to retire to her bedroom.

William disappeared in a hurry from the table and returned after a short time with Mrs Doyle, whose farmer husband lived just over the rise in the next-door farm. No doctor lived within many miles and Mrs Doyle was the local midwife. That night when William peeped in to see Laura she whispered mischievously, "If the family increases at this rate, William, the family will grow like Mother Hubbard's."

William reddened and shushed, saying, "You're right, dear. I think other people will have to increase the population for some years now."

It was strange but true that the family remained static for some years after this, although big families were the order of the day.

Within a fortnight Laura was back at school carrying out her usual duties. Charles had begun school, being five earlier that month and a Maori girl of eighteen looked after the two girls, and the baby during school hours.

William paid Marara a few shillings a week and kept her parents in vegetables. He received a hint from one white settler that the girl got enough in wages without the family receiving any vegetables.

William replied rather haughtily, "The girl is a great help to Mrs Tobin. If I think that she deserves a little extra compensation it should not concern anyone but ourselves."

After that William found that his white neighbours treated them with greater respect but offered no advice gratuitously.

For some months the settlers had gathered in an empty goods-shed, that, for some forgotten reason, had been built on the roadside about a quart of a mile from the port. They had approached William on the subject of religious observances on Sundays. They had rather shyly asked him if he would care to act as a lay reader each Sunday afternoon unless a travelling preacher of another denomination happened to be in the district.

After giving the matter some thought, William agreed to hold the Anglican service if someone would fill an organist's position, and train any singers they could get to form a choir.

The storekeeper had a very old but still servicable harmonium which he presented to the good-shed. When thanked for his kind gift, he explained that his wife wished to be organist, and that he was buying her a piano.

So, wet or fine, after that, the goods-shed was filled by settlers from far and near. The service began at half past two in the afternoon and finished an hour later, so that people could get home and get their work done before dark.

People rode or drove from as far as five and more miles. If a Wesleyan or any other preacher turned up on a Saturday people turned up just the same and William sat with his wife and children amongst the congregation.

A travelling preacher had very few boarding expenses when on his rounds through the country. He would generally arrive at the local 'pub' on a Friday evening. After breakfast next morning he would saddle his horse and ride round calling on the settlers, and contriving at the same time to find out which families belonged to his persuasion. After that he was certain to be invited to stay with one of his following, so he would cancel the hotel room and take his bag to his host's home. Through the year they had a number of travelling preachers belonging to various sects. William made a point of attending each service, as people of many creeds came to join heartily in the services which he took.

Just before the Christmas holidays of eight-four, William received a letter from the Secretary of the Native Affairs Department in Wellington. There was a vacancy in the Awanui school near Kaipara, and if he would consider applying for it the application would be accepted at once.

After talking the offer over with Laura and considering it from every point of view, William filled in the form and posted it at once.

"In some ways I shall be very sorry to leave here," said William ruefully. "Our garden is better than it has been yet and we shall be leaving it all ready for the next teacher to reap the results of our hard labour. I have been very proud of this garden for some time."

Laura agreed. She felt very sad at the thought of leaving the results of their many hours of patient and hard work. Her flower garden was a mass of bloom and the sweet scent of the flowers on the evening air was refreshing.

William aroused himself from his reverie, "I suppose we had better give the children their breaking-up feast as usual? That is, of course, if it will not be too much for you with all the packing to think about directly afterwards."

"Of course we must not disappoint the dear children," Laura replied decidedly. "I would be sorry to disappoint our little ones as well. They do enjoy it so much as it is exciting for them. I shall get Marara to stay. The trouble of the cooking will be hardly noticeable if she is here to help around."

Marara broke into loud sobs when she heard they were leaving shortly. Laura comforted her by saying that, as she packed, she would be sure to find some dresses and other things that would be useful to her. At the thought of some frocks and perhaps bright ribbons as well as other little odds and ends, Marara's sweet face broke into tremulous smiles and she was soon her gay and laughing self.

Laura told William that she thought Maoris lived in the present and pushed the thought of change from them.

"I don't agree with you, dear," said William gently. "I think they are like the Irish. They joke while their hearts break."

The next week was a busy one. William paid some of the bigger boys to bring manuka wood from the waste lands beyond the school ground. The land belonged to the Maoris round about but was not near enough to their kainga for them to worry about the twenty or thirty acres covered with tall manuka trees. The chief had agreed to allow William to cut all he needed for household purposes for the sum of thirty shillings a year.

So after school, while their companions were on their way home, the big boys had a cup of tea and some bread and jam, then they brought huge armfuls of good stove wood and cut it up to suit the colonial oven. They joke'd and laughed and would have worked until dark had William not paid them and sent them home rejoicing.

Nowadays a colonial oven would be presented to a museum, but then they were used in most homes in the country. The oven holding two long trays was placed on two rows of bricks in the fireplace. The space below, between the bricks, was for a fire which heated the bottom of the oven. On the top of the oven iron stands with crossbars were placed on which to put cooking pots and frying pan, also the indispensable kettle. A fire was set below the pots and kettle and everything cooked as merrily as dinners are now cooked on a smart electric stove.

Laura baked cakes and boiled plum puddings until the little pantry was full to overflowing. Maori children were very fond of jam tarts, she knew, as she filled a large clothes basket with small tarts and oblong jam turnovers. She also made loaves of mixed flour and wheatmeal and baked them in a camp oven, using the sittingroom fireplace as the camp oven had to sit on the side of the open fire, nestling in hot embers and bot ashes on top of the closely-fitting lid. Laura was now well used to making her own bread with hops and potato yeast.

Marara had now forgotten her tears in the joy of helping with the preparations. Her big brown eyes danced in her pretty face at the sight of such piles of good food to be enjoyed later.

The night before school broke up Laura boiled a huge boiler of rice. The children loved a big plate of rice as much as the sweetest cake, and the day would have been spoilt for them had she forgotten the rice.

Everything went off beautifully the next day. After three o'clock when the children had sung "God Save the Queen" and shouted loud hurrahs to William's 'Hip' 'Hip', they played at French Tig, Hunt the Slipper and other merry games in the playground in front of the school. At the same time Laura, with some big boys and girls hurried to set a large white table cloth on the grass outside the back of the garden. They carried out big meat dishes of cut cake and pudding, and the rest of the eatables, while William boiled water for tea in two kerosene tins.

When everything was ready a boy rang a dinner bell which brought the other children along at once.

Grace was sung before the children sat down. They had learnt the words and tune in school and sang it melodiously with reverent faces. At first the children were too shy to eat, but one after another gained courage and it was not long before the dishes began to look foolish. The meal ended with a big plate of boiled rice, topped with brown sugar and swimming in milk.

Some of the boys finding they had no room for their rice, just opened their shirt fronts after scooping up the milk, and poured the rice inside! They laughingly said they would eat it when going home.

"Too full now," said one youngster, tenderly patting his tummy. All uneaten food was divided amongst the children. Then both Laura and William shook hands with each child, saying "Goodbye" and watched them run and leap down the slope to the big gates. They knew they would miss many of these gay little youngsters.

After tidying everything away they finished the afternoon quietly, knowing that there would not be much rest for them until they had unpacked their household goods in their new home at Awanui.

CHAPTER FIVE

When William and Laura saw their new home at Awanui and walked round the garden which enclosed the house from the school ground, their hearts sank within them.

"I do not understand how people can leave their premises in such a shocking condition," cried Laura indignantly. "It will take us weeks to get rid of this rubbish and there isn't a vegetable or a healthy flower in the whole of the garden."

William pacified her by saying that he would get a stout Maori lad to do the preliminary work. He knew that she was thinking of the beautiful garden that they had left behind for the next teacher to enjoy. He could not foresee the days and years ahead when they would be known by people in the Service as "the couple who can make a flowering Paradise out of a wilderness." Some of their children often met people through the years who had heard of the beautiful gardens they had always left behind when moving on to another school.

William paced up and down the untidy garden with his arm around his sad wife, while the children played merrily outside the garden gate.

"Do you remember, Laura" he said presently, "the first time we heard that my application for a Native school was accepted? We thought then of our life to come as rather like that of a missionary and his wife. Sometimes I feel that I have been called to this work and that we will be sent to another school as soon as we have beautified this one, and helped the Maoris around by understanding their difficulties."

"But, William, that would be most unfair" cried Laura. "It does not seem fair to offer us another school later on when we have got this garden - so much work - in good working order. Look at the depressing work facing us."

William agreed with her sentiments, but went on, "You remember when the inspector, Mr Pope, came on his examination visit last year. Well, he said something that night after dinner when you were putting the youngsters to bed that I have often thought over." He spoke of the work we had put in at the Manganui school and the delightful surroundings we had been responsible for making." He added, thoughtfully, "Mr Pope seemed to be musing aloud." He spoke of teachers who had no idea of enriching the district to which they had been sent. He thought it might be our mission to move on constantly as we seem to have the gift of making a home anywhere, and the influence our lives exerted upon the community would go on bearing fruit even when we are forgotten."

"This is rather a frightening idea, William. It tears a little piece out of one's heart each time a lovely garden is left behind. I loved every corner of our garden at Manganui. Those trellises that we put up so carefully and our big violet patch. But don't you think that a trellis down that path-----."

So they planned for the new garden in the intervals between getting the rooms arranged to their satisfaction, cooking, playing with their well-loved family and going through the books and equipment for the new term.

They were both young and life called to them from the hilltops. It seemed to say that while they had their health and a promising young family that they had nothing much to grumble about.

Soon the school would be filled by bright laughing girls and boys and the school year would be in full swing again.

With hope in their hearts and love at the helm, work would be a satisfaction and their holidays a reward for good work well attempted.

Life at Awanui seemed to be in some ways a continuation of their life at Manganui. They made friends with their pupils, doctored the sick and suffering, and again William was asked to act as layreader. This time he found that they already held services in the Board school some miles away. The children of the settlers attended the white school, as it was then called, although one or two settlers living nearer to William sent their children to his school.

As a general rule both he and Laura found that the settlers' children, as pupils, were no brighter than the Maori children. As soon as they grasped the English language they generally did well. Awanui, not being far from Kaitaia, was a pleasant little place in which to live. If one could not get what one required from the little store there, the ride to Kaitaia was not too far for anyone wishing to shop at the general store there.

For many years Laura kept in an album a sketch that William had made of part of the Kaitaia district, when the river had flooded and ran over part of the low lying country. The tops of fence posts showed out of the waters and scattered trees looked very desolate with the flood waters lapping around their trunks.

It seemed that William's prediction was coming true when in eighteen eightysix, near the close of the winter holidays, the family found themselves at a new school they were to open at Otatau, Hokianga.

They had been very interested in the steamer trip around the North Cape, and in the crossing of the bar at the Hokianga Heads.

Laura was very tired as they took a smaller boat up the river, and was not able to appreciate the marvellous scenery of hill and bush that met their eyes at every turn and twist of the river.

They spent a few nights at the Taheke hotel while awaiting transport to Otatau and had been aroused by the severe shocks of an earthquake, the origin of which was later located at Tarawera, Rotorua. It is now a matter of history, but then the destruction of so much scenic beauty, including the famous pink and white terraces, combined with the tragic loss of life, made a topic of conversation for many a long day.

When riding the five miles out to the Otatau valley they forded the river below a beautiful waterfall that was a very picturesque sight. The river was wide and the current splashing past the legs of the horses rather

frightened the young children. A party of Maori men had arrived at the Taheke hotel with horses for William and Laura and she thought the ride would be most enjoyable, but William did not feel so sure as he was to carry the baby. The three elder children were each picked up by a Maori rider and they enjoyed the change until the wide river came into sight. Charles felt quite a man as he clung to the young Maori but acknowledged that he did not like to see the water rushing past as they crossed.

The scenery was almost breath-taking. Giant forest trees bordered the greater part of the winding road and innumerable song birds sang sweetly among the high branches that swung leisurely in the morning breeze.

From almost the moment of their arrival at the school premises Maori men and women came in a constant stream to welcome the new teachers. The school fence was the boundary between the vast Maori lands and the wide district that the Government was opening up for new settlers. It used to be a game of the small children to shout that they were on Maori land and then spring through the wire fence exclaiming "Now I am on the white man's land."

The Otatau school was set on a rise which was a continuation of a range of hills and ran up the valley towards the Pukerata settlement, often spoken of as the Pukerata pah. The main road ran past the school gates and part of the way alongside the Otatau river which merged into another further down the valley - as far as I can remember after so many years.

Across the river was scrub covered contry extending to the hills near Kaikohe, a place noted for its one time fierce warriors.

At the back of the school and the house garden, the ground sloped down to the banks of the Maungataua creek. In many places of the South Island it would be described as a river, but it was only an infant compared to some of the rivers of Hokianga. The banks were high and had ferns and native shrubs growing up them from the water's edge. A pleasant flowing and friendly creek in time of fine weather, but a raging torrent in times of a flood - often overflowing its bank. It was a wonderful sight when the flood waters swirled down in a "banker" with whirlpools in the current that rushed in clay-colour froth towards the lower reaches of the valley.

The three furthest hills in the chain running up the valley had been pahi, or fortresses, in the earlier eighties and must have almost been impregnable as they were very steep and commanded a wide view over the neighbouring country. The one overlooking Pukerata was ideal for the purposes of defence. Its slopes were very high and steep and an advancing army would have found little cover on any side from the foot of the valley to the top of the hill.

There was a deep moat around the crown of the hill, part of which had fallen through the years. Shrubs and tall grasses grew abundantly. During the strawberry season it was William's and Laura's practice to take the family for a walk along the crest of the hill. Strawberry plants grew everywhere and it was no trouble to pick a basketful in a few minutes. The first of the last three peaks was called the "Acacia Hill" by the family, as tall acacia trees covered it from top to bottom on the side of the main road. In the flowering season it was a joy to the eye.

Across the flats on the opposite side of the valley fronting the school was a range which the family called the Kaikohe hills, while across the flats beyond the Maungataua creek the Wauku mountains climbed towards the blue sky. They were covered with heavy bush from foot to crown and in the soft air of the valley they looked a most beautiful blue colour from across the flats.

During lean years when the potato and kumara crops failed in the Maori settlements there was a general exodus of the fit and the strong to the gumfields on the hills around Kaikohe. Only the delicate women, old men and little children remained in the settlements on the flats, while the others lived in hastily constructed whares on the fields and dug gum for dear life.

I think that it was about the year eighteen eightyeight that the crops failed; the bigger pupils at the school went away to dig gum and only the younger ones were left to attend school. The poor little things were so hungry that when Laura discovered that they had come without any breakfast and brought no lunch, she used to supply them with any extra food she had; cooking extra each day to keep up the necessary amount. William made enquiries and found that the Maoris had so little in the settlement that they only had one meal daily and that at night. He represented the matter to the Native Affairs Department in Wellington. An order was sent to William enabling him to buy enough ship's biscuits at the Taheke Store to satisfy the needs of the children at school.

So many large tins of biscuits were sent out on pack horses from the store that they filled up every available corner of the house.

The children asked their mother if they were to have a share, quite a natural enquiry on the part of small children, but they learnt very graphically about the sufferings of hungry children when Laura replied: "Indeed not, they are for the poor little starving children who come to school without any breakfast, and they would have nothing until they have a little food before they go to bed, if we could not help them, The Government is sorry for them and wants to help too. We shall still give them their bowl of thick soup that they enjoy so much, and that will help them until they have some food at night. You may watch your father serve each a share but you are not to look as if you would like to taste one little piece of biscuit. Now, remember that dears." She wisely did not say she would buy some for them to eat, it was intended to be a lesson and was so taken. Many years later when the smaller ones were in their teens one of their friends gave them ship's biscuits to sample. Instead of finding them food for the gods as they had imagined they felt quite sorry for the little hungry children of the past, but the Maori children had accepted their share as though the biscuits were a gift from Heaven itself.

Laura still continued the hot soup until she knew the children had more to eat at home, and in that way they received a little extra care through the early spring months.

When the last party of gumdiggers returned with their cheques there was great rejoicing at Pukerata, and they all worked hard to get their fields well planted.

During the winters at Otatau many of the little ones came to school wearing scanty clothing that the winter's wind could whistle through.

Laura rummaged through their wardrobes and cut down some of her own garments to fit the shivering youngsters. Teachers were very poorly paid and William worked hard in his vegetable garden so that he would be able to pay his way. He was very thankful when parcels arrived from England where his mother lived in Exmouth. His father's regiment was stationed abroad. Each mail from England brought papers, letters and magazines and twice a year large parcels arrived, containing an abundance of clothing for them all. One lot brought winter clothing and the other, clothing for summer. It was because of these parcels that Laura was able to give worn clothing to the school children. She often remarked that instead of having five children, she seemed to have dozens of children to care for through the years.

Laura's fifth child was a wee babe with dark grey eyes and a crop of near black hair.

The children were always excited when the parcels arrived and Louisa once asked how Grandmother knew their sizes.

Laura replied that she had friends with young grandchildren with corresponding ages. They were taken by her to shops when she wished to buy clothes for William's young family.

"Isn't that very kind of her!" exclaimed Louisa who was trying on a dress that had just arrived for her. "I do think Grandma is a very sweet woman."

William overhearing that felt a pang of home sickness, and regretted that circumstances made it impossible for him to take his wife

and family across the ocean to meet their English relations.

When attacked by home sickness he would seize a spade or hoe and spend some time in the garden. The exercise in the open air and the delight of seeing the plants grow and respond to his care, softened the thought of separation from those he loved overseas.

When he visited the Maori settlements William was interested to see how diligently women of all ages worked in the fields with spade or rake, hoeing, earthing up the potatoes or thinning out surplus pumpkin shoots. He noticed how the work seemed to fall mostly to the women as soon as the crops were in the ground. The old men sat about in the sunshine while the younger men went pig hunting in the bush, or joined a contractor's camp where bushmen were always in demand. The men had to be strong and willing workers.

From the camps, logs were floated down the river to Kohukohu where there was a large timberyard employing many men.

Sometimes an old man would take a cart down into the white settlements, carrying sugarbags of potatoes or kumaras which he would barter for old clothing or a few sticks of tobacco per bag, or anything else that would be useful to the Maori community.

At that time a sack of potatoes was sold for very little. The Maoris lived mainly off the land. They fished the rivers for eels and in the season shot or trapped woodpigeons in the forests, so a few shillings went a long way and seemed a small fortune. It was generally spent for the good of them all. When really anxious to make money, a group from the valley would camp at the gumfields until they considered that they had earned enough for a while.

Sometimes on a Saturday morning an old Maori man, whom the pah people called "Solomon of the Evil eye" because one eye had somehow been injured, would come to see William. The two would sit out under a spreading maple tree in the back garden where there were several woodblocks.

William could speak Maori quite fluently and he enjoyed hearing the old man speak of his boyhood when Auckland was still tribal property and there were continual wars and disturbances among the many tribes living there. Each peak around the harbour was a fortress and he remembered how carefully the small boys of the tribes were guarded, as they were the future warriors of the race. Solomon arrived in Pukerata while still a young boy, having been captured by a raiding party.

He remembered when he had first seen a pakeha, or white man. He was quite a young boy when some white men from a trading boat at Rawene found their way to Pukerata with some friendly Maoris. Children ran and hid while the wahine scuttled into the whares. He stood his ground with the men, some of whom had been to the port at the Heads and had traded with visiting sailors. Solomon giggled like a girl when he recalled his fright when he saw a very fair-haired and pale complexioned young trader. He thought the man was a kehua (ghost) and was prepared to run if the other Maoris did.

He agreed with William that the Maoris were very superstitious. In the dark they jumped at any unusual sound, thinking it was caused by an evil spirit. That was why they shouted and sang loudly when they passed a cemetery or burial ground after dark. They did so to drive the evil spirits away as they were suspected of being afraid to face a noise.

Laura would take the old man a big cup of tea well sweetened, which he gratefully smacked his lips over. She always gave him a plateful of food, varying it each time. She was always so delighted with the natural courtesy of a people who had never had the advantages of civilisation and yet carried everywhere with them an innate dignity and grace.

She remembered her father once saying that the astonishing part about Maoris was that when fighting another tribe they treated their prisoners with kindly good nature, even if they intended to knock them on the head and put them in the cooking pot the next minute. Rude and rough manners were picked up by them when mixing with unscrupulous traders and sailors, in the coastal ports.

CHAPTER SIX

When in eighteen-ninety Laura had been compelled to take another fortnight from school she presented another daughter to William. Constance was a little dark haired child and through her life she proved herself a gift from God as she was always at hand to help one or other of the family in times of trouble or sickness no matter how far she had to travel to get there.

Married, as when single, her heart embraced them all, she never tired of doing good either openly or by stealth.

Among the families who had come to the lovely bush-covered valley of Taheke was a family from England.

It was widely understood that the father had been manager of a big cotton factory and that his wife was a relative of Coats, the wizard, whose reels of cotton were in every country in the world. They had a family of two sons and four daughters, all older than Laura's younger ones, but they soon made friends and enjoyed many happy times together.

Mrs Gordon-Jones was a charming woman and she and Laura soon became great friends.

Through the passing years until William moved on again the two families were very friendly and happy in each other's company. Every Tuesday evening William and Charles went down to spend the evening at the home of Mr Gordon Jones. The older ones playing whist, while the others played card games. Every Thursday two or three of the Gordon-Jones family would return the visit, arriving in time for dinner and then playing whist again.

As Louisa grew older she went with her father and Charles to dinner and games, on Tuesday nights. The mail arrived by coach at Taheke during the evening from Kawakawa and it was the habit of one or other of the Gordon-Jones Boys to ride the three miles to the rapidly growing township and await the sorting of the mail.

Supper was always served when the lad returned and William and his two young ones left soon after with their share of the mail.

Nowadays the programme would seem very tame but in those days of no cinema, no radio, and only an occasional concert, people made their own pleasures.

Laura was a very unselfish woman and gave herself a great deal of trouble in order to keep the family amused and interested.

On those Tuesday evenings she would bring out some of the evening dresses that she had kept through the years, and, as the little girls were small, they loved decking themselves in them. They pushed a table against the wall, with a chair to get on up to their impromptu 'stage', and each child would take turns in giving an item as though they were actors on a real stage. These items were worked up during the preceding week.

Laura had been a very slight girl when she married William in the little church at Te Henui. The dresses that she had worn then were too small for her now, as she had grown matronly although possessing a beautiful little figure.

She had a pale pink silk dress that the girls loved and a blue silk with the faintest white line. These were the two that the girls preferred to any other, and Laura smiled as she watched the little figures with the tight bodices and long full skirts covering frilled silken petticoats. She represented the audience as she sat beside the fire with her knitting, or sewing, smiling at the children and clapping heartily at the finish.

Beyond the school fence on the European settlement side, the fifty acre section beginning there, and embracing the last two hills of the range on which the school stood, had been taken up by a family who had emigrated from Yorkshire. The Hales had a young son called Harry who attended William's school, and often played afterwards in the school grounds with the younger children of the Tobin clan. Harry knew that the children held concerts on Tuesday evenings when their father was

away, and he often slipped over to the back door, knocking timidly until someone asked him in. He was very shy at first each time he attended, but after a few months he became more daring and offered to give an item. He had a deep gruff voice, but very pleasing and unusual for one so young, and gave a good rendering of "A life on the ocean deep." It was his sole offering but invariably received hearty applause. George had a very musical ear and played his mouthorgan to accompany all items, and it was really quite delightful if one passed over shy and uncertain notes on the part of either player or singer.

After "God Save the Queen" and a piece of cake helped down by a glass of milk, Harry would slip away as quietly as he had come, wishing that every night could be a Tuesday evening.

He was just a little dumpling of a lad with a big smile and crumpled fair hair. Laura always made him feel very welcome at those little functions. She mothered every young thing that came near her, whether chick or child, and there are many elderly people now scattered throughout New Zealand who remember her with tenderness and affection.

Settlers were arriving in great numbers to take up sections which seemed to average fifty acres. I remember hearing many years later that after those blocks were settled the Government forgot about them for about fifteen years. When the fact was finally realised in Wellington demands were sent to the settlements for back rents and there was a loud outcry. I heard this at secondhand and never heard whether the rent was paid or not, or whether the rumour was entirely correct, but repeat it for what it is worth. It was fairly widely circulated at the time.

Many of the sections were heavily bushed. The forests had to be cleared. Saw-pits worked overtime and houses made of freshly sawn timber were going up rapidly in all directions. On many farms the clearing was done gradually, taking many years. A little would be done at a time and many of the farms looked very picturesque perched on a knoll or overlooking a river, in large enough clearings for gardens and small orchards to be soon in very flourishing conditions.

The settlers who had arrived with some capital soon had their farms in good working order. Labour was very cheap. The settlers who had started "on a shoe lace" as the saying goes, were only too glad to work around the settlements until they earned enough to begin work on their own farms.

Country roads that ran through beautiful bush with ferns and flowering creepers edging them for miles when William and Laura had arrived in eighteen-eighty-six, soon had ploughed fields on each side in long reaches down the valley. It was sad to see the beautiful bush disappearing, but many stands were left in places, while other farms hardly showed much in the way of clearing so it seemed likely that native bush would add to the beauty of the countryside for years to come.

A young single settler bought a small holding not far from the Punakitere Board school where William still continued on Sunday afternoons as lay reader. I forget this young man's Christian name but as he added so much romance to the whole district I shall call him Gerald. This Mr Holt soon became very popular everywhere he went.

He approached William one day on a matter near to his heart. It grieved him to see children growing up all over the countryside whose religious instruction seemed to be a matter of indifference to most people.

He knew of course, that many of them attended the services with their parents and friends, but probably many of them looked upon the service as a way of passing their time, as many of them would have had no teaching whatever in scriptural matters.

The two men talked about it for some time. William then gave out a notice during the service to the effect that Sunday School would be held every Sunday afternoon at two o'clock. It would close at ten minutes to three, thus enabling the children to join their parents before the church service began.

The response was more than gratifying. Mrs G-J (as she had come to be called all over the district, although it was supposed that the family had no idea that they went by the name of the G-J's) offered to take the older children while Mr Holt and another helper took the others in graded classes.

Boys and girls of seventeen and eighteen attended, bringing their younger brothers and sisters. The result was that the schoolroom was filled with an interested gathering of young people of all ages. The older students had lessons on the Prayer Book before they began a course of Bible reading.

Daddy Holt, as he was soon affectionately nicknamed by the younger children, was in great request and found friends springing up around him everywhere. He was a weekly visitor at William's home. He came to dinner every Thursday evening when some of the G-J's were expected at the same time, and he joined in the usual rubber of whist.

The two girls, Louisa and Freda admired the black velvet coat that he wore for best and Constance never went happily to bed unless he had chatted with her first. She was his special pet and he never failed to make a great fuss over the little dark-haired girl.

For many years after, when two Hokianga-ites met elsewhere in any part of New Zealand, one or other was sure to ask about "that nice little chap in the velvet coat, you'll remember him!"

It was somewhere about that time that the Rev Philip Walsh, later Archdeacon, who lived at the now historic church at Waimate North, wrote to William, and said that he would be taking services in the Punakitere school every three months.

Could he take up his old habit of staying with his dear friends when he was in the district? He had been a great friend of their's when they lived in Waitara, Taranaki. William, of course, replied promptly and not long after the clergyman arrived for his visit. He was older than William but they enjoyed much in common, while he and Laura discussed botanical subjects as that was her long suit. She had been a botanical student before marriage and was never at a loss in the garden or the bush.

Mr Walsh arrived on a Friday afternoon, having ridden over from Waimate. On Saturday morning, after helping Laura for a little while, William and the clergyman set off on foot to visit every farmhouse within a five mile limit. They were both excellent walkers and thoroughly enjoyed the chance of a long day together. A good walk to both of them meant anything from fifteen to twenty miles a day. The clergyman was not as active as he had been but could still give a good account of himself.

The children were always in bed and asleep except for the four elder ones who had lessons to look over, when they returned.

The settlers were most hospitable and Mr Walsh said they found it hard to refuse the many meals which were pressed upon them everywhere. He thought a fine stamp of settler had taken up farms and that the district would soon develop beyond recognition.

The whole family went to the service next morning. It was a family service at first, begun at ten o'clock, and the young children went out at half past when the Communion service was held. The clergyman was surprised at the large number of communicants.

The G-J's took Mr Walsh, William, Laura and the family back to dinner midday. The big table where they dined was surrounded by a very happy crowd and Mrs G-J said that the meal was to be the accepted meeting-place for the two families each Sunday that the occasion was enriched by the presence of Mr Walsh. The boys said 'Hear! Hear!' and everyone agreed that it would be an event to look forward to every three months. Laughing, talking merrily, they left the table feeling that they were just one big family.

Time passed quickly and they soon left for the afternoon service. The room was packed every Sunday for afternoon service, but on Mr Walsh's visit the same congregation filled the room morning and afternoon.

People naturally hoped to chat with the clergyman after church in the school grounds before all dispersed, so the afternoon was waning when he and William followed the rest of the family home to Otatau. William found some of the G-J's there who had been invited by Laura, so they spent the evening and enjoyed the unusual pleasure of Mr Walsh's company.

When they separated that evening, it was agreed that the Sunday of Mr Walsh's visit was to be spent in the same way as long as the Tobins remained in the district.

"William," said Laura, as they prepared for their night's rest. "Do you not feel very much younger tonight for having Mr Walsh here? I think it really carries me back to my very young days."

William laughed. "You sound as though you are your own grandmother, dear. You are really not so ancient yet as you think."

"But it is nice to have someone with us whom we knew when we were first married, don't you agree?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Time went on, and Charles was about ten years old when William sent him to the Board school at Punakitere. He said it would be better for the lad to be under a teacher other than himself. He thought the competition in a larger school would be excellent for Charles.

William had been teaching him extra subjects after school and during free evenings. At the same time the elder ones he gave grammar and easy lessons in oral French, while he helped Charles and Louisa with more advanced French. Latin, Charles had been studying for some years.

Charles, later, during the First World War as a chaplain and stationed with a New Zealand regiment in France, found that he had very little difficulty in making himself understood while chatting with the French people.

William thought that Louisa, like Charles, had a natural aptitude for languages. She progressed as well with her French that instead of Latin, he began teaching her German, a language in which he was also proficient. She was soon reading "Easy Lessons in German," and translating short German stories. He was very pleased because she readily lapped up both languages.

William used to tell his children as a form of encouragement that when he was a boy of nine, he was learning Greek and Latin and already beginning to enjoy his lessons.

He was determined to instil a love of walking in them and after an early lunch on a holiday he would take Laura and the children abng a track on the top of the hills leading to the high pah overlooking Pukerata and its beautiful valley. Carrying the youngest child, he led the way, stopping to show points of interest along the track where it was bare of trees. The children loved the stretches where no trees hid the river winding through the valley below and across the flats to the far hills.

Although William was rather a Tarter where lessons were concerned, and kept them working overtime at them, he relaxed at the weekends and holidays.

"How high up are we here, Father?" asked Charles as they rested on a falled log on the hill-top. "We seem to be nearly as high as the hills over there." He pointed to the Kaikohe range of distant hills further down across the valley.

"We seem to be so much higher because they are so far away," replied his father while he busily filled his pipe. "When you are older I must remember to tell you children some of the tales of this valley that Solomon has told me."

"Why don't you write some of the legends down, William, before you forget them?" said Laura, thinking of the days when her father edited a paper in New Plymouth, and his delight when someone brought in really worthwhile tales of the countryside. "They would be very interesting for articles."

"I am afraid I would not shine as a journalist," returned William

with a laugh. "Perhaps one of our children will follow in your father's footsteps some day, and earn a laurel leaf for a book of poems, or piece of literature."

Laura looked round at her children proudly. They were listening with interest and glanced at each other with brightened eyes.

"It would be delightful!" said Laura, "if one wrote up all the romance and beauty of the legendary figures peopling these valleys and forests. I am sure many brave Maoris loved and fought up and down the valleys. This place reminds me of some parts of Taranaki but, of course, we have so many more hills here."

"That makes the beauty of Hokianga so alluring," said William. "These chains of hills wooded to the top would enchant lovers of beauty. This province would be a traveller's joy for hundreds of years if the settlers could be prevailed upon not to burn and destroy the vast and beautiful forests. Think of the settlers already here - their first instinct is to hack and hew and burn. They show neither rhyme nor reason in their haste to despoil these magnificent forests."

The children were growing tired of remaining in one place, so their parents rather reluctantly rose and continued their walk. While the youngsters prattled noisily Laura and William thought of the deep dark forests covering the ravines and heights of the range of hills opposite. They knew that no Maori would wander alone at night under the tall trees that towered towards the sky and that very few stout hearted Europeans would venture into their vastness after nightfall.

The track ahead made by roving cattle ran over the summit of the Acacia Hill. Charles wanted to climb a tall tree that overlooked the valley, so William and Laura sat down again, quite pleased to rest awhile as they had both had a busy week. The other children wished to play in the moat which made a wonder playground with its native shrubs and ferns growing up the sides of the deep and wide moat. The banks were falling in at different parts of the moat, otherwise the walls were as straight as the sides of a house, and almost as high.

William never failed to marvel at the ingenuity and energy of the early Maoris. With the primitive tools of those early warriors, the work they had done was most remarkable even after the rains and neglect of later times.

In days to come the family often thought of their many walks up and down those ancient fortresses, where many a long-forgotten grave lay among the waving grasses and under nikau palms. It seemed strange to them when they remembered those happy times, that, through all those past years in their wanderings on Saturday afternoons and through holidays, they had never once met a Maori man, woman or child on the slopes and hilltops in the Otatau valley.

Did the Maoris ever think of the old wars that had been so bitterly fought there and of the many warriors lying forgotten and unsung?

Did they shrink from the possibility of meeting some of those gallant spirits who may be even now still wandering over their old battle grounds?

Whatever the reason was, the fact remained that they had often seen their Maori friends passing on the road below, the road that skirted the foot of the whole chain of hills, but never did they remember hearing, at any time, of the Maoris using the summit track as a short cut to their marae, or seeing the sweet-faced children play among the bushes on the hill slopes.

It was just about this time, that some of the Maoris belonging to the Mahurehure tribe, led by Hone Toia, became abusive each time they heard the dog tax mentioned. When they knew that the collector was coming to collect taxes they would get their numerous dogs, many of them mongrels, and take them up a far gully to tie them there on the slopes of the Wauku mountain.

The collector received no satisfaction when he stopped wayfarers and endeavoured to glean something tangible about the dogs running around the pah.

When stray mongrels were seen running around, no one owned them. No

one had seen them before. It became a sort of private war between the collector and the men of the settlement.

If he arrived suddenly in the midst of Maoris lolling round the marae with dogs all over the place he received a shrug and denial. There would be muttered replies that the owners were on the gumfield or over at the coast gathering mussels or fishing from the rocks.

When a man was actually seen with a dog following him he refused to pay the tax saying that he would rather go to the "lock up".

A number of men were sent to Mt Eden but when they returned from gaol they were not one whit ashamed of being there.

"We had good tucker there and me think it a good place to go in the winter" was their reply in answer to any query concerning their sojourn there.

The more self-respecting Maoris muttered a little, but when driven into a corner between going to Mt Eden or paying the tax, they paid at once. Others who were goaded on by the smaller tribesmen gave a great deal of trouble but were finally induced to pay the tax. They resented having to pay because they owned dogs and for some years there was much stir and unrest among the younger men.

One year some of the younger men barricaded themselves in a whare. When the collector arrived, they shouted abuse and defiance, refusing to open the door. He returned later with some policemen when they were received by shots fired over their heads.

Fortunately no one was hit, and through the peaceful offices of the chief of the tribe the men opened the door to have a parley. Some paid the tax and others were taken back to Herd's Point by the police. An uneasy undercurrent remained but William heard nothing as the Maoris were as silent as oysters upon the subject of the dog tax, so he left the matter alone when he talked with any of the tribe.

The young girls, however, had dark hints thrown out to them by the more difficult pupils at the school. They would talk about the men banding together to drive the white people into the sea.

When they mischievously followed the girls across the ground to the house gate they would mutter that they were followers of Hone Toia. "They had plenty guns" and one day they would creep upon the settlement and shoot all the whites. They would keep the children to work for them.

One little girl named Iwi Ngaro told them that the Maoris had secret meetings and would not allow other Maoris to know what they were doing. She said they were trying to get guns and powder without the police finding out about it.

She also warned them that if they (the girls) spoke about it, then these men would place a curse upon them and they would be food for the Kehua.

That night at dinner Louisa took her courage in both hands and said to her father, "Father, what exactly is a kehua?"

William looked at her in surprise, "Why do you want to know? You know I don't like you children getting hold of some of those Maori words."

"Iwi Ngaro said something about the kehua today," murmured the little girl who could not bear to see her father stern with her. "She said some of the Mahurehure tribe are angry and want to drive all the white men into the sea. Does she mean us?"

William glanced at Laura. Then said rather severely, "Some of the Maoris like to call themselves rebels. They are the unruly members of the tribe but I haven't heard about anyone wishing to drive us into the sea. What else did the child say to you?"

The little girls told him as much as they could remember but their remarks seemed very muddled to William who was very exact. He did not like to hear about the guns and the powder, so resolved to have a quiet word with Glover, the storekeeper, when he went down to Taheke to order the next month's stores.

Mr Glover was a very quiet reserved man, but William knew that he was a friend of the magistrate, Mr Clendon, of Herd's Point. William had often spent some time with them when, on fishing trips down the river,

He and the men whom he went with often received hospitality from that much respected gentleman, and the magistrate in return had frequently called on William when on a round of duty and enjoyed William's hospitality in return.

So William knew that a few hints in the right quart might prevent the spread of any unpleasant ness brewing among some of the hotheads of the Maori Settlements.

Laura was very uneasy, remembering the attempted rebellion in the early eighties when the Maoris made their ploughing raids on the Taranaki settlers. She did not know that the little girls were nervous at night when the wind shrieked around the house and the rain beat noisily on the window panes. They wondered if Iwi had "set" her kehua on them!

CHAPTER EIGHT

That summer in eighteen ninety-four was a particularly hot and dry season. Some of the settlers on the fertile river flats were able to make three lots of hay. One old farmer said that a very dry summer foretold a boisterous and difficult winter and he quoted the old Maori saying "When spring and summer give with both hands you must expect the rough Winter days to take much away."

The Tobin family was growing in numbers. Laura had written to her sister Mary saying that she seemed to have one babe walking and talking when another arrived to need her loving care and attention. They did not really arrive so rapidly but still William could look round the table with a feeling of pleasure at having so many children to call him father. They were a very happy crowd and enjoyed every moment of any holiday.

As the elder ones were able to take care of the younger ones and to be responsible for looking after them if they wished to ramble on the river flats or on the hills, William spent more of his spare time in the garden. With Laura weeding, transplanting or budding not far away from where he was working, they were able to enjoy each other's company in a way that was not possible when they took the family out walking. Most parents had big families and felt very sorry for a couple who had several and yet who did not care for babies and wished to spend their days in senseless frivolity.

Laura now taught in the school throughout the day as the attendance had increased and the general practice was for the Headmaster's wife to act as assistant and sewing mistress. During school hours one or other of her two elder little girls stayed in the house doing her set lessons and minding the small ones under five, she managed very well until her sister arrived to do her turn at baby sitting.

In another way the elder children of a teacher's family were useful because as they advanced in their classes, one or other could take a lower class to enable Laura to devote a little more time to the weak ones in her classes, and also to have a moment to run across to the house to see that everything was all right.

It very often happened that when children who were good at taking lessons grew up they followed the teaching career and made excellent teachers, having learnt to handle young children at a very early age. In those early days of Native schools, many sons and daughters entered the teaching profession although many never stayed in the ranks but continued their studies and finally followed legal careers or entered the church. William and Laura in later years were proud parents the day they heard that Charles had gained a Marsh Scholarship and was to enter St John's Theological College in Auckland.

Charles at this time had grown into a fine and dependable lad. He was very studious and a great bookworm, as indeed the whole family were great readers. At the same time he enjoyed a good game of cricket and other active games, when he was not rambling about the river flats in the Maori land with his sisters and brother George.

The girls were very proud of their brothers and joined them in their adventures, whether it was a race to see which child could climb to the top of a big branching manuka tree in the shortest time or how far they

could clamber around the banks of the Maungataua creek without losing their footing, or touching the water rippling below their steep and tricky passage. They skirted deep dark pools in their escapades and never knew that the hair would have stood up on their parents' heads had they dreamt of some of the places in which their children wandered.

William and Laura had both spent their childhood in their early years under the care of competent nurses who ruled their nurseries with a rod of iron so they did not think of the kind of frolic that would appeal to their young ones. Charles and Louisa had been told to look after the younger ones so they did it in their own way and the children enjoyed a tomboyish and happy childhood.

One great pleasure that was never forgotten by the children was the mushroom season. At daybreak Charles would creep to the girls' door and whisper that it was time to get up. He and George waited outside with pails and billies until the girls creeping out, silently shut the door behind them. Then, with a wild rush they were away down to the wire fence skirting the school ground. It did not take them long to follow the track through the manuka bush that they knew so well. Presently, the trees thinned and a wide grass clearing opened out before them. Mushrooms grew there in great quantities and in a short time they were on their way home through the bush.

Laura and William were always up when the children arrived with their tempting burden, but they always appeared surprised that the youngsters were not in bed. It was a harmless deception and the little ones never saw through it, nor did they notice the elder ones admiring their parents for acting so cleverly. So the years rolled on in that little home in its romantic setting of green valleys and far mountain ranges.

Charles was about fourteen when he took the little ones to task for talking about their private affairs to their playmates. He had overheard the children gossiping with the little girl next door and thought they were too young to form intimate friendships.

On wet days when not a schoolday Charles used to take the others over to the big schoolroom where they played at being at school. Indeed, he saw that they really got down to their work and he gave them problems in arithmetic and lessons in other subjects.

One very wet day he said he would give a lesson in history and geography would be attached to it to make it interesting. Charles put the big map of the British Isles on the top peg of the biggest easel and got his pointer. "Now, he began sternly, "attend to what I have to say." The children sat up and eyed him with interest. Lessons when taught by Charles were not school at all, but were sometimes wildly exciting as when he drew a picture of the New Forest and told them about Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Or Dick Turpin and his gallant horse. They could even visualise the cities and villages that his exploits had made famous. He had taken episodes from the books of Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and Thackeray, among others, illustrating the tales on the blackboard until the children knew the heroes of those books by heart and felt they could have found their way blindfold round the British Isles.

"I am going to show you something about the country that Grandmother's people belonged to from the very early days.....Grandmother Tobin, I mean. Next time I shall show you Grandfather T's starting place in early Irish history."

"What about Grandpa Brown?" queries Louisa who dearly loved history and old family records.

"I shall not forget him" replied Charles with a rather haughty look at his sister, "Are you teaching or am I?"

Louisa subsided with a faint blush. The younger children looked at her with the same awe as they would have watched a young primer child ask the inspector a question.

Charles stood with a rather aloof air until all were quiet. Then he pointed to the map of Scotland and began his lesson. As he went on he moved from the map to a blackboard near. There he drew a very attenuated looking family tree, filling it in with the names of different ancestors

and then showing the places on the map where their home places were. He told little anecdotes of some of their forbears which his father had told him and time passed very quickly.

"Won't I just tell Squiggles Young about this next time she brags about her mother's people in Australia," breathed Freda who was lapping it all up. Charles pounced upon her like a ton of bricks, "What did I hear you say?" he enquired pointing the ruler at her. "Did you say that you were going to repeat private family history to any outsider who likes to listen?"

The little girl was shamefaced and wriggled in her seat. Charles looked at her silently for a moment or two as he had seen his father look at a difficult pupil, then went on in a conversational tone, "I want you young ones to understand for once and for all, family records are something for the family alone, unless politics get mixed up with it, as say, in the days of the Young Pretender - or something like that. When there is no way of pushing one's claim to some end - if politics are mixed with it - then it is easier to keep family records to oneself. Our father said that one's family tree should always remain the dearest possession of one's family except" and Charles looked round him with an earnest air, "except, I say, in very exceptional circumstances. One would be in the time of a disastrous war where we might think our country in great danger. We could entrust the records to the trustees of some reputable museum. In that way, an old and honourable family record could be preserved. Or if we thought our line in danger of dying out because members do not trouble to keep records. It would then be quite permissible to publish them for the sake of historical records."

George asked, "Does everyone have a family tree?"

"Of course," replied Charles. "Everyone must have a family tree because no family ever started in the middle of a century without having grandfathers and grandmothers. The trouble is that so many people in the past never kept records --- sometimes because they couldn't read or write, and sometimes because they were not taught to take a pride in their own family record."

The children were impressed and sat waiting for Charles to continue. He went on after a few moments. He tried to recall the remarks his father had made to him on the subject. "Father said that the benefit of Family Trees being kept is so that the descendants of noble..or even good... families would never lose a sense of pride in themselves. They would always try to be honourable and kind and good and generous to those needing a helping hand. Even if, through the force of circumstances, they had little, family pride would keep their backbones stiff like pokers so that they would never stoop to do anything shabby or mean. They would remember that they had the family tradition to uphold. Is there anything else I could tell you?"

"Some more, please," they cried in unison.

Charles pondered. Then said slowly, "I may not say it as Father did but will do my best. He said that some families may be among the highest in the land one century but may have reverses and suffer financially, so that through the next century the family may be in very humble straits. It would not mean that they lost caste, as it were, because if they remember their background they will not lose out always, as by the next century the family may have been able to regain its old footing. I hope you enjoyed this."

Up went their hands and a chorus of "Yes, Sir," broke from the children.....just as though Charles were a real teacher.

Louisa thought afterwards, when she was thinking about all he had told them.

Charles smiled broadly at them, "Well, run along now. Don't get wet and get ready for tea," said he, as he put away the map and cleaned the blackboard with a duster, before he locked the door and followed them to the house.

As he hurried through the rain, he thought, "It is funny I have to lock the school when we never even lock our doors. I suppose it is because the school equipment is not our own property."

In many ways Charles was old and thoughtful for his age but that was because he was his father's constant companion during his long walks in spare time. In other ways he was just the same lovable and endearing lad that boys of that age are when carefully brought up by parents who show their love and interest in their own children.

William and Laura would have been horrified had they been given a glimpse into life in the middle of the next century when some parents were to take one road and their children another, while laughing at truth and goodness, they galloped by the rest of the world in a wild chase after idle dreams and selfish pleasures.

CHAPTER NINE

Charles came home from school one day with an air of excitement surrounding him. "I am going to edit a paper - a weekly one - and call it the "Otawa Buster". Some of the boys at school will give me news to put in, that is, if I make them a copy, too. Don't you think it a good idea, Mother?", he asked Laura eagerly.

"Of course I do, dear" she replied with a warm smile. "Your grandfather Brown was editor of his paper for a long while, I'll help you to find interesting news out of the papers."

Charles threw his arms round her and kissed her delightedly. It was not often that he displayed so much abandon and she was secretly moved.

Louise said impulsively, "I'll help you too, Charles. I'll write poems for your paper. Freddie can help too, won't you?" turning to the younger girl who was standing by. On the spur of the moment she blurted out "No, I can't, I am going to have a paper also."

They all turned and looked at Freddie. There was a murmur of "Copy Cat, Copy Cat" from somewhere but no-one looked as if it had been heard. Charles looked at her in surprise, "Where will you get the news Freddie?" he asked gently, "If everyone's going to contribute to mine, what shall you do?"

"I don't care" she answered, feeling rather small and uncertain. "I'll get my own news. You will see."

"Never mind, Freddie" said George who was always her champion, right or wrong. "I shall help you both."

The idea was not allowed to be dropped. That evening after home work was done Charles got a sheet of foolscap from his father and began to rule his papers into columns. He printed "The Ottawa Buster" in great black letters and put his name as Proprietor and Editor on one side and the date in the opposite corner. Then he drew a picture of a chain of hills with flat valleys on either side and the two winding rivers. This he did below the name of the paper to give it style, he said. A small but neat drawing to represent the Ottawa district.

Charles was very careful over his drawings because for some years he and a companion, Walter Baker, at the Board school had submitted drawings to the Waimate North Annual Show, in the school sections. One year he would receive first prize for drawing while Walter came second and the next year their positions would be reversed and the same happened when competing for the writing prizes. Their teacher, Mr Symonds, was very proud of his two pupils as the sections were competed for by most of the schools in North Auckland. The two boys were said by the judge of the section to set a high standard for other competitors to compete against.

Freddie was rather piqued at the unconcern shown over her proposed rivalry. She said no more about it but shut herself into the girls' room whenever she could and copied little stories and short poems in a neat handwriting but did not try to run a serial as Charles had said he intended to do. When she had nearly finished her half sheet of foolscap which she had begged from her amused father she was touched to see George bringing in an item.

"It is about a horse, Freddie" he said urgently, "I hope you have room for it because it is good. Daddy Hales said so and he knows. He

laughed so much that his bottom teeth fell out. Truly, Freddy, I saw them."

He and Freddie giggled. That was a stock joke with the old man as he still had his own teeth and in a perfect state they look when he threw his head back and roared with laughter at one of George's jokes.

The story was carefully copied down and George expressed his admiration at the paper she had prepared.

The following Monday evening when Charles had read his paper to his admiring listeners before the sitting room fire, Freddie waited until the expressions of appreciation died down before unfolding her paper.

"The Literary Observer," she read, waiting with downcast eyes for any remark from the circle. As none came, she went on reading item after item, and pleased at hearing pleasant little side remarks about some of them. George, of course, encouraged her by leading any laughter. Being nervous she read faster and faster and when she read the horsey tale it seemed very suitable as she galloped to the end. The family received the paper very nicely but applauded the horsey tale, laughing heartily enough to please both the editor and the journalist who had supplied it.

So until the paper died an unnatural death, of which more anon, the little girl got her brother to furnish a story or some local news each week. She meant to make sure that her paper would be as eagerly awaited as all did the reading of "The Ottau Buster."

As time went on the two papers became a popular weekly institution. After the washing-up was over and before lessons began, Charles read his paper which filled a sheet of foolscap. His serial was very exciting and was based on the Maori war. After comments had died down the family sat in silence before the fire, while Freddie opened her paper and read it aloud. Everyone treated hers as though it was as interesting as could be expected, but she thought they all appreciated, as she did herself, the stories that were still faithfully contributed by her merry brother, George.

Charles' serial grew more exciting week by week. The boys who were his special cronies at school thought he was a budding Dr Gordon Stables, a well-known writer of that day who contributed the most thrilling tales of adventure to the Boys' Own Paper. So Charles really worked hard over each chapter to make each one more exciting than the last. His paper was the bright spot of Monday evening and Freddie had expected hers to be as eagerly awaited as time went on, so the sad story had better be related here.

One week she had found a very comical story about a cat. In it, the cat was mentioned as the determined cat. Freddie had never heard the word, or noticed it in her story books, so she did not know how it was pronounced. However, she copied it out carefully and felt certain that everyone would be most amused when they heard the story.

When she was reading aloud the story, she saw and word facing her and thought she'd make a lucky shot at it. She was right. A shout of laughter went up from the circle of listeners. She had read "then the dirty minded cat....!"

They would not stop laughing for her to finish the rest. Everytime she made an attempt to go on the shouts of laughter were hardly suppressed. They told her that they had enjoyed the paper immensely but she would have to excuse their interruptions, if she would insist on having a dirty-minded cat!

The story leaked out somehow among their friends and the poor child made up her mind never to attempt to use a strange word again unless she had asked someone about it. For weeks after, if an older group wanted her to run away, one or other of the group would ask her very sweetly how her dirty-minded cat was getting along. She was out of hearing before the sentence was finished!

The Monday following that of "Freddie's disaster" as she thought of it for years, everyone looked expectantly at the child when they had duly commended and admired that week's copy of the "Ottau Buster."

As she made no move to do anything, Laura said, "Now, dear, it is time for you and then it is bed for the little ones."

Freddie murmured that her paper was finished and went round saying Goodnight as she had privately asked her father before dinner if he would

excuse her from lessons. "Certainly, dear, if you don't feel well. What is wrong?" Then, seeing the child's discomfiture, he patted her on the head, and said, "Was it because they upset you last Monday?" She held back her tears and nodded vigorously.

"You must forgive them if they hurt your feelings. Some day you will smile yourself when you think of your dirty-minded cat," said William, "I couldn't help smiling myself."

He had comforted her but she did not feel able to see the evening out. Everyone made kind remarks and she went off to bed feeling that they had not intended to hurt her feelings. "I suppose I would have been laughing myself if it had been someone else's paper," was her last waking thought.

Charles was very pleased when he received, that week, an article which Freddie had painstakingly copied out for his paper, - but not so pleased as the little girl was when the article was duly read out and commented upon. From that time onwards Charles had no more devoted gleaner of news than the late Editor of "The Literary Observer."

It was not long after this that Charles returned from school and announced that the committee of the Punakitere school had arranged for a picnic on the following Friday week.

"It is to be the best picnic we have ever had," said Charles, excitedly. "The parents are to take the children down to about a mile from the Taheke Falls and we shall have lunch with real bush around us. It will be fun to explore because the boys say that it has never been trodden by white men. Maoris probably know secret tracks from their fighting days. It will be fun, exploring for some of those tracks."

"I don't like the idea at all!" said William vehemently. "Haven't those men any common sense at all? I think I know more about the native bush than many of them, seeing that as a young fellow I hushwhacked in the heart of Taranaki's heavy bush. If a child strayed it may never be found. No one knows what deep ravines may be there - anyway, the plan is ridiculous."

Charles was taken aback by his father's vehemence. He looked across the table at his mother.

She replied to his unspoken question by saying, "Your father is quite right, Charles, the bush is no place for a picnic for young children. I don't know what the parents are thinking about."

Charles was thoughtful for a few moments and then said in a restrained tone, "Have you ever known of any small children being lost in the bush, Mother? I know they make up stories on the subject, but have you ever known it to happen?"

"Indeed, I have," replied Laura, "I stayed at a farm on the ranges in Taranaki. They were really, I think, what one would call the foothills of Mt Egmont. A little boy wandered away from the farmhouse into the bush which was quite close. The cleared paddocks were on the other side. I was only a young girl, but I have never forgotten the dreadful days of anxiety we all spent, but, fortunately, a party of men found the little fellow before it was too late. He was ill for days afterwards."

"Exposure and fright combined, I suppose," said William, "He was a very fortunate little lad as others have never been found. Not only children, either. My friend Galwraith. You'll remember hearing me speak of him, Charles."

"The Postmaster," said Charles at once.

"His brother, a surveyor. They were in the depths of the forest inland of Napier. One day he left his party who were enjoying a spell and said he believed they were nearing a stream. He'd be only a few minutes. Going off alone, without compass or equipment of any sort, he never returned. After searching for the rest of the day, one man returned to Napier and got together a group of experienced bushmen. They searched for days but finally gave it up as hopeless. Years later, his body was found beneath a huge tree where that part of the forest was being cleared. He had evidently wandered in circles before he became exhausted. The pitiable part was that had he climbed a huge tree near, he would have seen Napier away in the distance. Trees were giants, having grown for centuries, but he evidently forgot they were on the crown of a

hill, or was too tired to think and gave up the struggle."

"How did they know who the man was after all that time?" enquired Charles.

"From a watch and wallet they found," replied William briefly. Then he continued, "It was a lesson people should remember if lost in the bush. They should travel downhill, because sooner or later they would come to water. Then follow the river out of the bush."

The children were longing to ask more about his lost friend but Laura made a sign to them to be silent. She knew how firm the friendship had been between the two men. They immediately switched their minds to the little one lost on the foothills of Mt Egmont.

"Do tell us, Mumsy" they urged.

Laura poured out another cup of tea for William before she began. "I do not know what we were all doing at the time but recall that I had been helping Mrs Mayton to make the beds. I think we were just standing talking when we heard loud shrieks from the garden. I have dreamt of those dreadful shrieks through the years, Mr Mayton, and the men working about the place, rushed along and one went off to the nearest settlement for helpers. We had bushmen, Maoris, Polish and German emigrants hunting for close upon three days. Men went into the bush in two's and carried strong whistles for fear of losing touch with each other. Some of the farmers' wives came for miles around to help in the kitchen."

Laura paused and thought for a moment, then resumed,

"It was a dreadful time, - men straggled in at all times, haggard and worn out, but not one had seen a trace of the child. The bush was so dense that they had to blaze tracks as they went along. As soon as they had hot drinks and some food, off they went again. Finally two young men stumbled over the baby not thirty yards from the boundary fence, down the side of a deep ravine. Some of the men had passed there several times. On the floor of the ravine a deep rushing stream tore down over huge boulders. The poor child must have been dreadfully frightened when darkness fell. The men thought it had bumped its head on one of the big boulders strewn down the side of the ravine, and had, perhaps, been unconscious for many hours."

"Oh, Mother," said the tender hearted Louisa, her face white, "Is he alive, or did he die from the shock?"

"He was months getting over it, but when I last heard of him he was proving himself to be a fine athlete in the world of sport. They said he grew pale even then; if he thought of anyone lost in the bush."

In bed that night, while William slept the sleep of the just, Laura lay awake for hours. She thought of the side verandah of the Mayton's home up among the hills where she had slept, with the sound of the forest to soothe her wakeful hours. The side verandah was wired in by chicken-wire, as that side of the house was built close to the hill's precipitous edge. The wire-netting reached to the verandah ceiling, so there was no chance of anything going wrong, in the way of children falling from the verandah.

Looking through the netting, you could see that the land fell away almost immediately. The tops of great trees waved below looking like a vast green carpet falling to a deep valley below, and which rose again almost as it touched the deep floor of the ravine, until the green sides reached to hilltops higher than the one on which the house was situated.

Laura remembered the beautiful sight of the waving tree-tops and how she used to listen to the loud murmurs that rose from the wind in the leaves below. It is a murmur that can no more be forgotten than the sounds of the waves lapping the shore at night. She used to think that the sounds were murmurs echoed from the memories of beautiful songsters which had nested in the branches through the centuries, and the call of the waters as they tore down the ravines on their way to the Pacific Ocean. A call, gentle and seductive as they babbled over pebbled beds during summer, but loud and plaintive as they thundered down the valleys during winter's angry storms. All those murmurs and calls woven into sweet and mournful melodies by the mountain breezes.

That and many more unforgettable whispers of Nature rose and fell on the air above the forest trees. She wondered how many secrets of lost wanderers and sweet voices of lost children added their touch of tender music to the ever-rising, ever-falling murmurs as the green branches swayed softly beneath the sun or the stars.

And so she fell asleep, lulled by the ever-old and yet ever-new lullaby of time, the memory of waving, tossing boughs upon the midnight hush.

CHAPTER TEN

One Saturday morning William sent the bigger children down to the manuka flat while he helped Louisa around the house to leave Laura free to cook an early lunch.

William believed in boys and girls taking their share in the household tasks and Saturday morning was their day for doing many things that had to be partially shelved through their busy week.

When the children returned with the information that they had "heaps" stacked by the lower fence and that they had all worked very hard, William was coming in from the vegetable garden and was very pleased to see how cheerfully they had carried out his orders.

"We are having a treat today, children. After lunch we shall go down the Taheke road to the swing bridge, from there we shall take the turning that leads to the native bush you love."

"Oh, good!" The smaller ones capered around to show how the prospect delighted them, but William had not finished.

"Then we are going to climb the Peak beyond the clearing. So, now run and get tidy. Mother has lunch ready and we must get away as soon as everything is finished afterwards."

They had only once climbed to the top of the Peak. When they were younger William left Louisa with her mother and the little ones while he and Charles looked for the easiest way up. The first time the climb seemed very strenuous. They could find no track anywhere. The way seemed too steep and forbidding as they clambered over logs rotting under masses of leaves, tangled vines and moss.

Sometimes the logs were covered by magnificent kidney ferns but as a general rule the creepers and undergrowth had overmastered the more delicate growth, and ferns of most kinds had to take a back seat. They peeped out coyly from many delightful spots of greenery whenever they could.

William knew Laura would never be able to clamber over the piles of dying branches and through the lush growth of shrubs and seedlings that covered the track they tried to form, as they had to pull themselves up the steep hillside by drooping branch or vine. So, after a pleasant rest on the summit, they looked for a large enough clearing where they could all sit and admire the view at some future time. They wandered around for some time and finally found a spot where no trees would obscure their view over mountain range and far flung valleys.

They looked over the cliff edge to see where they could find a better track down than the one they had hacked out to the summit, and after some trouble chose a place where the slopes seemed slightly more promising. As they descended William felt quite sure that with help, and by taking it more easily, Laura and the children would manage the climb while he carried the baby. It was all one with William, he carried the baby with a joyful heart when he was helping the family to enjoy an outing.

It took a little while to skirt the hill, or Peak, as it was known locally, but the path was a very pretty one bordered as it was by bush shrubs and overhanging trees. Laura had wanted to try the ascent that day but they said the climb had been enough for one day. They had all been once since that time to the top and had remembered that time as a red-letter day.

The children were delighted at the thought of climbing again to the Peak summit. The hill stood apart from its fellow hills, of a steep

range and reared up towards the sky with forbidding-looking cliffs thrusting above the forest trees on the lower slopes. It had taken William quite a considerable time to choose the route they finally followed. Noticing a long gully running to the summit, he had found a landmark to follow on the way up. He remembered the time he had seen the gully. William and Mr Holt had met on the road near the swing bridge and while talking he had glanced across at the Peak, across the river. With his fondness for climbing his practiced eye had at once seen the possibility of gaining the summit fairly easily. It was only a few weeks later that he had taken the family to sit in the shade below while he and Charles made their way to the top.

They took their time in climbing to the top of the Peak. William arranged a seat for Laura and himself on a fallen log with the baby playing on a rug at their feet. The rest played nearby or sat on the grass talking while they admired the hills beyond. William told them to keep at a discreet distance from the edge of the cliff as a careless slip would have meant falling many feet below where one would land on large boulders or on the tops of the trees covering the lower slopes.

The view that day was superb. The air was so calm and pure that it seemed as though they could see far across the world. Gazing across the wooded valley they saw nothing between them and the far-flung horizon but mountain upon mountain, peak upon peak, clothed in the sombre green which belonged to magnificent and untrodden forests the mountain ranges rippled onwards like majestic waves on the ocean's breast. One felt that one would be lost forever if one tried to explore those vast mountainous regions.

Not by the wildest stretch of their imagination could Laura and William believe that within their day, men and their families would penetrate and make their homes in those innumerable valleys lying in the depths of those countless ranges. The peaks were so far-flung, the timber so heavy that it seemed impossible to think of such glorious country being brought into subjection to puny mankind.

They sat, it seemed, for hours and feasted on the marvellous views on either hand, hardly speaking, so lost in admiration were they at the wonderful works of their Creator. Before they rose to go William said "I am glad that we were all able to come up here today. If we never get here again the memory of these glorious views will be with us always. We must never forget that He who made this vision of beauty will never fail to hear the cry for help from the humblest creatures He also made."

"I was thinking much the same thing, William. Looking across at those hills reminded me of those words about the beauty of holiness. God must certainly have gazed upon this feast of loveliness."

When Laura paused they sat gazing silently at the view while the children tried to memorise their parents' words so that they would indeed carry the remembrance of the scene before them as they left their childhood behind and roamed into the life they would meet as the years unrolled and 'future' beckoned them ever onward.

William missed the track on the way down where the branches met overhead, and the bush looked as though twilight had fallen, so dense was the undergrowth that they had to force their way through. They found the way very tricky for a while, especially as they had the young children to guide and help. Sometimes it was necessary to catch a vine and slide down a steep incline catching the children before they landed in deep moss and ferns. William was handicapped by having the baby under one arm but it was surprising to see the way he managed to help Laura to keep her footing and guided the younger ones. Halfway down they burst through some undergrowth to discover the track that they had lost so the rest of the descent was very pleasant and it was not long before they were picking up their kits at the resting place below.

Talking over their walk that evening William said as he and Laura sat over the dying embers of the fire, "The incoming settlers will never consider this to be a progressive colony until they have hacked down most of the magnificent bush. The countryside will lose its glory when the last forest goes but the commercial world will fully appreciate the sight of fertile meadows and thriving stock."

Laura was sad as her thoughts pictured the waving forest trees and the peaks of the mountains fading into the far distance that had so fired their imaginations that afternoon.

"God's hand painted the beauty of the forests that will be lost so that the world's coffers may be filled," she said as she rose to put away their supper tray, before looking in at the sleeping children on her way to a well earned rest.

William had spoken to the Funakitere committee about the folly of holding a picnic on a heavily bushed flat near the falls but none of the men concerned would agree that it was no place for a picnic. Neither would they agree on the possibility of children getting lost in heavy bush that covered miles of country.

They did agree that they would have to keep a wary eye open for possible trouble all day, but adhered to their plan of holding their outing in that chosen spot.

Picnickers were to assemble at the school grounds at 9.30 a.m. Those with their own conveyances could leave for the picnic ground with a member or two of the committee to get water heated, to find a pleasant place for the luncheon ground and to arrange part of the sports ground. Other people who had no way of getting there except by walking the distance would be driven there by the rest of the committee who had a number of gigs and traps offered them for the occasion - not to mention carts and bullock drays.

Had the picnic been held in the usual place which was in a large paddock lent by the Taheke hotel-keeper-postmaster many families would have taken their small children and enjoyed the day's outing.

As it was, many women decided to keep their children safely at home. They grumbled at the committee's choice of grounds as they all knew the hotel-keeper and enjoyed picnics at his private grounds. The hotel keeper was very popular in the district and worked hard to make functions there a success.

Laura told William that she would not dream of taking a large family to such a place. "I'll stay at home while you go with Charles," she urged. "I know he will be safe if you are there, otherwise I'd worry about him all day."

Mrs Hales did Laura's washing once a week for the princely sum of half a crown a week. She had lunch and a "snack" before she left which were thrown in for good measure.

"Most people only give me two bob and only enough dinner for a wee cat!" she said.

Laura told her that she supposed people around found it hard enough to keep a family, without the luxury of having someone to do the washing.

"Yes," replied Mrs Hales, "I think that is so. Times is hard enough as it is, for anyone."

Then she inquired if the children were going to the picnic.

"Ah!" she said, upon hearing why they were not going. "Ah! That is what Mrs Telfer was telling me. She said she don't wish to mislay any of her young ones. She said none of hers was going to that misguided picnic."

Charles knew that his father would not be able to keep an eye on him all day, but that made no difference to him. He knew that unless Mr Symonds took some of the bigger lads into the bush he was not to enter it. He meant to talk to the teacher and see if he and Walter Baker could blaze a trail as they went along. He had heard of bushmen barking the trees when they entered a new location and he meant to try out the same thing. So he looked forward to the day with a great deal of pleasure.

Charles was a most reliable and conscientious lad and was trusted by all who knew him. In fact, his sisters always thought of Charles' reaction to any adventure before they thought of joining in with young companions.

If they thought Charles would consider some escapades rather doubtful they left other children's suggestions severely alone. In

truth, the thought of how Charles would act in any situation acted as a curb to the younger ones through their adolescent years. In after years, some of his former companions at school were known to speak of the great influence for good, which he had unknowingly exerted upon their young lives.

A day or two before the picnic Charles arrived home in a very happy and excited mood.

"Do you know what, Mother?", he began as soon as he entered the kitchen where she was busily preparing their next meal. "Walter Baker and I tackled Mr Symonds about blazing a trail when he takes us exploring. He thought it a good idea and told us each to bring a tomahawk. Not the girls, of course."

"How good he is to co-operate with you boys," said Laura, her eyes resting with pride upon her bright-faced son. "You must tell your father about it when he comes in, as he has been a little concerned, although he knows Mr Symonds is such a careful man."

"Oh! He is, Mum," said the boy warmly. "Where is Father? I never saw him anywhere on my way home."

"I don't expect you did," replied Laura, lifting the roast out of the oven and basting it. "You know that two-acre paddock of Mr G-J's across the river? Below the Peak? Well, he went down directly school came out, as the old gentleman has to weed it before it gets away from him. He can't get labour to offer for weeding, so your Dad thought friends should not shrink from giving a helping hand."

"Father is so kind to everyone, I know. I remember when Mr G-J put it all down in onions, that Father said then he was sure no wage-earner would care for the work. Why don't Will or Alf help?"

"They do," said his mother reprovingly. "Alf is particularly busy just now with the cows. He can only help for a few hours every day while Will has so many orders for his lovely violins, that he has to finish some to fill the orders sweeping in. Your father thought they can both chat as they weed and enjoy themselves as much as women love chatting over a cup of tea."

Charles laughed. "They'll talk politics until the darkness falls, I know. There won't be a politician in the Empire who isn't dissected while those onions are being weeded. What they don't know about the political game isn't worth knowing."

His mother laughed with him. "That's what I told your father. They won't notice aching backs nor cramped knees if there is a political question to debate."

"I've seen Will in his workshop when he has been making violins. He is clever, isn't he? I love the ones he makes out of the beautiful rewa-rewa wood. He told me that he gets orders from Kawakawa and Auckland, and that, with his photography, helps to bring in a nice sum to help the parents with."

Charles ran out to get the morning kindling, and to send the two elder girls in to set the table and tidy the little ones for dinner.

Laura was bustling round getting everything ready, so that William would not have to wait for dinner, when he returned from the back-aching work in the onion paddock.

She knew that he felt a great veneration for the old Englishman, and he did not like to think of him weeding that field alone. Running into her bedroom to put on a fresh lace collar, she passed the girls' bedroom door which was standing open. Freddie was crouched on her bed, examining her face carefully in the little hand mirror.

"So, this is where you are?" exclaimed her mother. "I've been waiting for you to help me. What are you trying to do?"

"Oh, Mum," answered the child in a distressed tone, putting down the mirror and coming towards her mother. "You said if I tried to be good and kind and did all my tasks cheerfully that my face would look sweet and attractive. It doesn't look the weeniest big different, and I've been so good all day."

"Come into my room while I tidy myself, dear," replied Laura

hurrying along the hall to her room. "Your face will have a sweet and beautiful expression if you are always kind and good, and think gentle and unselfish thoughts."

"Well, I try to all the time, Mother, but my face isn't any different than when I got up this morning. I'm always looking to see, but it doesn't make a bit of difference."

"But, dear, you couldn't expect to see that shining out of your face, no matter how beautiful you became. Other people would though. When I was a girl people used to call me beautiful and the belle of the beautifully decorative Taranaki balls, but I never saw anything different about myself. It always seemed to be the same face that I had seen all my life. So don't worry about it but try always to be kind and thoughtful."

"Oh", in a relieved tone, "is that how it is? I didn't know."

"Now run along, dear, and collect the little ones. Remember what I have told you and don't worry about the old looking-glass so much. Your grandfather Brown would say "Why worry! Vanity is a flame that consumes all beauty."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Friday dawned bright and clear. Charles was up at daybreak creeping around his room to see that his things were ready and trying to avoid a board that squeaked when trodden upon.

George lay stretched out under his quilt, looking rather frail but sleeping peacefully. Charles felt sure that the others were the same, so he took his towel and sponge-bag and raced down the back paddock to the Maungataua Creek. Through the lower fence it was only a hop, skip and jump to the top of the bank.

He stood there for a while, looking down upon the quiet waters rippling over their wide, pebbly bed.

Through the years, the creek had widened as it rounded a bend higher up. The banks had caved in with constant flood-waters hitting that corner as they rushed round the bend, until the creek-bed was very wide in that part, and the current running down the centre of the stream had deepened the bed there. Charles enjoyed bathing and battling against the swift current rushing at a headlong pace down-stream. From the deepened centre, the waters shallowed to both banks, and the children waded and splashed there on hot days in the holidays while Laura sat sewing or doing some fanciwork on a wide ledge above the water. Young birch and other bush trees grew up the banks and lent a grateful shade to her resting place.

Charles undressed at his mother's favourite spot, and splashed through the shallows until he reached the narrow passage of deep water. There he swam for some time until he thought the others would be up and about.

William and Charles arrived at the picnic ground in a smart gig driven by Will G-J. The other members of Will's family were scattered, each being driven by friend or neighbour. Boys and girls sat about in different groups, watching each conveyance draw up and discharge one or more passengers. Then the driver drove across the clearing and unharnessed his horse, tying it to a bush seedling along the edge of the dark, densely timbered forest. It was not long before that part of the ground was covered by carts, drays and other vehicles, while the horses were safely tethered along the bush edge.

Women were busily unpacking baskets and seeing to the cups and mugs brought by everyone and the scene was one of bustle and activity.

William had already quietly cautioned Charles about not straying away from their teacher if they entered the bush, so he and Mr G-J found a cool place under a huge tawa tree and settled down to enjoy a quiet smoke and chat. They had been thanked for offering their services but were told that there were too many helpers already so both felt that they had done their duty.

When the school picnic was first mooted, some members of the committee had gone for miles around the district, calling at each

homestead and small cottage with a collection list, and asking for subscriptions towards the day's expenses. In that way they had gathered a large sum of money which would also help to provide prizes for the sports programme during the afternoon.

One young man had a brain-wave while collecting. He remembered that two farmers not far from one another were on distinctly bad terms. So he called at the nearer farm and asked the farmer if he would contribute to the picnic fund. Old Bellairs scratched his head doubtfully. Then he brightened up, "What has Mitford given?" he demanded. The collector looked at him with pretended surprise, "I have not been as far as his place yet, but why do you ask? I expect he'll stump up well."

Bellairs grunted, "Tell you what! If you can get anything out of him I'll give a fiver for every pound you get out of him." "Done," replied the collector. He spurred on his horse, ignoring the farms he passed along the road until he reached the farm of Mitford. Seeing the farmer cross his backyard as he rode up, the young man called to him, "Hey, Jim", said he, "I want to speak to you for a minute." The farmer hesitated a moment as he wished to get out to his ploughing. However, he turned and walked to the gate.

"Well, Harry, what is it?" he asked curtly, not too pleased at being interrupted.

"Give me a minute and I'll tell you," replied the collector. "I'm collecting for the picnic funds. Bellairs wouldn't put his name down but he wanted to know if you'd given anything. I said I hadn't been here yet....but he tried to give the impression I'd be wasting my time. He said that for every pound you gave he would give a fiver."

Mitford had been listening with a frown upon his bushy brows but suddenly burst out with a loud shout of laughter. Slapping his thigh resoundingly, he said, with another roar of laughter "Come inside. I'll give you a fiver. Then we'll see if he comes up to scratch."

Armed with Mitford's cheque for five pounds the collector returned to Bellairs's farm.

"Well, here you are! I wish I'd made a bet on it. Mitford gave me a fiver!"

Bellairs looked astonished. He looked the cheque all over as though he was sure there was something wrong with it. Then, with a great show of reluctance, he wrote out a cheque for twenty-five pounds.

The committee men writhed with merry laughter, but promised to keep it a secret until after the picnic had come and gone. They felt sure that the tale would gain them many free drinks when the pub was full on a mail-day.

When the sports began, parents and spectators got as close as they could to the competitors, all barracking loudly and clapping the winners of events.

The obstacle race afforded great amusement, especially when the boys climbed through a flour sack and emerged looking as though they had been in a snow-storm. An old man of seventy won the married mens' race. Men crowded round him after it was over and demanded to know how he did it.

"I guess," said one would-be wit, "his wife must have worn the trews all these years. He's run so fast doin' her bidding that no wonder we couldn't catch him up."

Everyone laughed loudly, and the old man laughed louder than all. The married women's race was won by a dumpling of a woman, whose merry face attracted all onlookers.

One elderly man raised a smile when he said to the young fellows near at hand. "See her? I ask you! What chance would a feller have if she was determined to catch him?"

"That's right, Grand-dad. You be glad you're too old to take her fancy!" called out a young man with an impertinent nose.

Charles was first in the 440 yards and won the high jump, beating his friend, Walter Baker, who came second, but Charles was second to Walter's race in the 220 entry, and to a hop, skip and jump trial, so both received hearty claps and bursts of congratulations.

There were quite a number of interesting entries and the sports programme took up most of the afternoon. The boys in the higher classes that were taught by Mr Symonds were very perturbed as they had been looking forward to some fun in the bush. He assured them that he would do his best about it, but that his first duty was to see that the sports events came off as arranged.

The sports officials had intended the crowd to adjourn to the banks of the river where they had arranged to have a pole extending over the water's edge for some eight or so feet, for the greasy pig competition. They had the pig with them but found the river too high in a fresh, to be safe. So that item was deleted from the programme. Young men had been practising for some time, in rivers and streams, so there was a general feeling of disappointment at the cancellation.

During the afternoon a cry often went up from one or another of the scattered groups, of "Child lost! Child lost!"

People from all sides of the clearing would rush across to the group from where the shouts had come. All children were told to go into the centre of the clearing. Mr Symonds called the school-roll and parents were asked to find their pre-school children. This took some considerable time and many parents were upset because they thought so much time was lost, if one had actually strayed.

Eventually each family was grouped and a loud sigh of relief went up from everyone when each child was accounted for. These scenes happened five or six times and the sports programme was held up accordingly. The last upset was during the last runout of hurdle races, and as the afternoon was growing late, the committee men suggested that they call a finish to the sports.

A hasty tea was dispensed and then the return journey to the many scattered homes began. Everyone spoke of having enjoyed a happy day but all the mothers agreed that they would be glad when they reached home with their families.

The boys in the upper classes carried their tomahawks sadly home. They felt that they had been 'done out' of some rattling fun, but Mr Symonds was secretly pleased that there had been no time for the exploration they had so gaily planned.

Laura had been worried all day for fear anything happened to some unfortunate child, so when William and Charles arrived in time for a delayed dinner, they were treated as heroes returning from the jaws of disaster.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Whenever a newcomer arrived in the district, to stay for a few days or longer, the settlers at whose home the visitor stayed, took the person to church with them on the Sunday afternoon, in order that their friend could meet other people and receive invitations from the countryside. In this way, Miss Squires was launched upon the local people when she came to spend a few months with her married sister, Mrs Johnnes.

The Sunday after she arrived, her sister took her along to the church service. As Sunday school was not yet out when they arrived at the building, they joined one of the little groups in the school ground, where Miss Squires was duly introduced to all and sundry. She was a tall, finely built girl of about twentysix or twentyeight years. A brunette with dark sparkling eyes and a milk and rose complexion, she was followed by many admiring eyes, as she strolled with her sister, who was one of the plump, bosomy kind, with brown eyes and gentle smile.

Presently the porch door opened and the children began trooping out, soon to be followed by the Bible students and the women teachers. The superintendent, Mr Holt, came last.

Sunday School had become so popular that Mrs G-J took all the girls and boys over fourteen and up to seventeen.

Mr Holt superintended, and took the church services on alternate Sundays, so that William was able to enjoy sitting with his family among the congregation.

The little group around Miss Squires was then quite close to the porch door. As Mr Holt came down the steps Mrs Johnnes spoke to him and then introduced him to her sister. It was said later that no man can consider himself to be a confirmed bachelor until his last breath has left his body. Many of the marriageable girls about had cast sheep's eyes at Mr Holt, and some had even gone so far as to throw a faint when he was near, but nothing had touched his heart.

It was then said that he was a woman-hater and that he lived only for his whist evenings at Otatau, and for his Sundays when he did his best to put the neighbourhood on the right track.

Women's eyes widened and men watched interestedly while Mr Holt remained with the little group. He could not keep his eyes off the attractive girl, and was heard to ask her if she intended to stay long in the district.

"No, I don't think so," she laughed softly. "It depends on Mr Johnnes and my sister. They may wish me to leave in a few days."

"Surely not," he began, a note of concern in his voice. Then went on with, "Ah! I see you are joking. There are so many beautiful views around the country, that a short stay would not be pleasureable. Do you ride?"

When she assured him that she could ride, a little, he smiled at her. "That is very nice. I am sure you ride better than you say."

Whatever else he had intended to say on the subject was cut short by the ringing of the bell for the service.

"Are you taking the service today?" asked Mrs Johnnes as they moved towards the steps.

"Oh! no! It is not my day," returned Mr Holt, his eyes wandering again to Miss Squires, as he stood back to allow the two women to pass up the steps, Mrs Johnnes looked up at him as she passed and said in a low voice, "Come to tea, some day soon. We shall look forward to seeing you." He stood still at the foot of the steps and let a stream of people pass before he collected his thoughts.

When he went into the schoolroom he chose a seat at the back of the room where he could watch the bright stranger who had so captivated his fancy.

Besides being a pretty creature to watch, she was also the possessor of a lovely contralto voice which appealed to the music-lovers in the building and some stopped singing so as to listen to her melodious voice. William, even, was impressed as he heard her pure, sweet notes floating up to the rafters. He had heard many famous singers in London, and he thought her voice would grace a concert hall in the Old Country where Britishers were wont to say that only the best was good enough for them.

After the service, William lingered by the swing bridge while he waited for Mr and Mrs G-J to join him. They were going up for tea, as Mrs G-J had not been up for whist on Thursday for quite a long while, and she and Laura missed their evenings together.

To keep abreast of her Sunday class, Mrs G-J spent most of her spare evenings gathering material for her lessons. As the ages ranged to eighteen years she could not teach them as she would a younger class, so just now she was taking them through the Book of Exodus, each student reading a verse until the chapter was finished. She explained the meaning of verses and prophecies as they read, and she was determined to make the lessons so interesting and instructive that they would leave a lasting impression on the students' lives.

So she had gradually dropped her whist evenings in Otatau, and either Will or Alf took her place. Mr Symonds and Mr Holt were regular visitors then also, and the one too many for whist, played chess with Charles. However, since the coming of Miss Squires to the district, Mr Holt, more often than not, sent a polite note excusing himself.

As the Board school teacher usually brought those little notes he was secretly very amused at his friend's infatuation.

Should William be called to a sick Maori's bedside, Charles played a good hand and took his place, Laura played, but only cared for cribbage, as far as cards were concerned.

It was a pleasant walk up to the Otatau school. The road now ran

between well-cultivated fields down the valley. When they reached the foot of the hill they always stood and debated the question as to whether they would take the track across the summit, or whether they would follow the road.

On a bright day on the hills one saw a long way down the valley, and the track was always called the "short cut" although in reality, it was no quicker that way than when one walked round by the road.

The two men, having Mrs G-J with them, did not consider the question, but took the road where the river ran alongside. As they walked, they spoke of the depth of the river-bed, and of the floods that had been so destructive the year before. The valley dropped away from the road, and levelled out when it reached the river-bank which was some forty feet below, so when the river had overflowed, the road was still above the flood-waters.

"I wish you could have seen the flood waters from the hill above," said William. "They spread far across the valley, through the waste lands of the ti-tree scrub, and made an awesome sight. The road across to the far hills must have been well-covered for some days. I believe that Kaikohe had a bigger flood than any of the settlers had ever seen."

"Dreadful for the farmers to have their farms under water."

"And so many cattle drowned" replied Mr G-J, reflecting that where his farm was situated only some paddocks on the frontage could be affected.

"It was a dreadful winter for so many people," agreed Mrs G-J as they came in sight of the school gates. "Women have told me very pathetic tales about the struggle they had to get going again. Cattle and pigs were washed against their fences and even the fence posts were washed away in many places. It must have saddened them to see their stock lying dead everywhere when the flood abated. I really don't see how some can be so cheerful afterwards, and yet the men and women just carry on and set us all a wonderful example."

"If you'll allow me to say so," said William gallantly, "it is because of your constant calm and influence for good that many of us feel uplifted though beset by many minor troubles. The settlers often speak warmly of you to Laura, and, in a lesser degree, to me."

"That is very kind of you," Mrs G-J spoke in an astonished tone. "I cannot see how that comes about....I only try to do my duty."

Her husband said gravely, "Well, my dear, if we could all say that, the world would be a very much better place."

There was no time for more as Laura was hurrying to the little gate opening into the garden. Mr G-J thought as he watched her that it was no wonder their settlers opened their hearts to her, as she was so beautiful and had such a sympathetic personality, whereas her husband had an English stiffish manner, which would make an ordinary person diffident in his approach to him.

"But," the old gentleman reflected, "a finer fellow never walked in shoe leather."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A great deal of interest was shown in the visit of Miss Squires to the district. Women hastened to call on Mrs Johnnes as the weeks went on, some with ready-made excuses for the visits, and came just calling to welcome the new-comer and to invite her and her sister to card-parties, musical evenings or "just-sit-around-the-fire and chat evenings."

Laura told William that she had heard from the G-J girls that Mr Holt was constantly dogging the footsteps of Miss Squires. He took her riding to show her the beauty spots of the neighbourhood and was, in turn, receiving lessons from the young girl in marksmanship. Yes, she was a 'great shot! - very few men better!

William was filling his pipe at the time. They had both been gardening as it was a Saturday afternoon. Sitting by the stile under a spreading macrocarpa tree which William had planted when they first

came to Otaua. Laura had been regaling him with some of the gossip she had gleaned from the two elder G-J girls. They had come up on Thursday evening with their father and Will. Laura had sat with the girls in the far corner of the room so as not to disturb the play of the whist-lovers and they had told her many interesting bits of news about people in the locality.

They were both gay and bright girls and general favourites wherever they went. A number of young farmers were said to be anxious to show them attention, but as they were not allowed to attend the local dances, and were inclined to be a little stand-offish, the young men never seemed to get any further. The girls knew they went by the name of the G-Js and were rather proud of the fact.

When Laura told him the most interesting items of gossip William said, after some thought, "I would like to see young Holt settled. He deserves a good wife as the life here is lonely for a single man. She seems to be very efficient, as well as a good shot, so he could go further and fare worse."

"I was thinking so, William," replied Laura, who had been leading up to a thought she had pondered over. "I know you like to have Friday evening to yourself after the school week, but there is no other evening as the children have so much homework. Couldn't we ask Mr Holt to bring Miss Squires to dine next Friday evening? It is for you to say."

"Is that what you have been so solemn over for some time?" laughed William. "I knew you were hatching some scheme in that pretty little head of yours."

Laura blushed a little, but joined in the laughter. "I have thought of it several times," she owned. "I feel anxious to know more about the girl, and one cannot do that when meeting her with several others. She must be attractive or Mr Holt would not be so interested. He has never taken any notice of girls before, and it is not because he is shy. He must be rather fastidious."

After a little more on the subject it was arranged that when William called for Charles at the Punakitere school, as he did every week when bound for the shopping area of Taheke, he was to call in on the way home and see Mr Holt about it. If he seemed pleased, Laura would then send a note across country by one of the school children living in that direction and ask Miss Squires for the following Friday. People in those days never stood on ceremony or objected to receiving an invitation a few hours before the meal was to be held, whether for lunch, tea or dinner.

William left for Taheke directly the school closed at three in the afternoon, every Wednesday, calling at the school in the settlement to pick up Charles who loved the walk with his father. It was a five-mile walk from Otaua, and ran past many progressive farms and through a large section of native bush. Clematis swung from the branches of tall trees, and when the rata blossoms were out the road led through very beautiful places. Bramble bushes grew among the green undergrowth at the roadside, and children gathered handfuls of the luscious berries to eat as they went to and from school.

William and Charles always shortened their stride as they reached the bush, as they loved to see the ferns and mosses with their brightly delicate and glossy green relieving the more sombre shade of the giant trees overhanging them. Sometimes flowering shrubs added a fragrance to the air, and they were certain to see many sweet throated tuis carolling melodiously far above the road.

Charles had a secret feeling that the native bush had been brought to New Zealand straight from Fairyland and I think he was never to be in the bush in later life without half consciously hoping for the sight of a dainty wee fairy under the low-growing ferns. A vein of poetry ran through his mind from babyhood and in his early twenties when teaching in various schools through the North Island, before he entered St John's Theological College in Auckland, he made many a welcome cheque from his articles, poems and stories sent to magazines and papers, though he would have blushed with modesty had he thought of it being mentioned here.

Laura had everything ready when the young couple were expected. The little girls had filled all the vases through the house with gay flowers plucked from the garden and they ran round helping in many ways.

William came out to the kitchen while Laura was giving the last touch to the pots and pans on the colonial oven before it was all ready to be dished up.

"Just fix this tie, will you dear?" he said, passing her the tie and standing before her. "I don't seem able to get it right."

"Talk about women being vain, William!" laughed Laura, as she arranged it to his liking.

"Hardly vain, Laura," he said apologetically, "say that I am inclined to be particular and that would be more correct."

"Well, one word is as good as another---sometimes," she agreed, with a smile, "I notice that you haven't said one word about me, or how I look."

"You know I always think you look better in black than in anything else. It enhances your colouring."

"Ah! thankyou, kind sir," and Laura dropped a mocking curtsy.

"And my lace cap? Do you like it?"

"Charming!" said he, looking at her lovingly, as she turned again to the stove.

"To change the subject, William. I hope they will come soon. My dinner is cooked to a T, and I don't wish it to be spoilt."

Saying that he would see if the young couple was in sight, he hurried out, Laura peered into the little mirror which always hung behind the door, and patted her little cap. Single girls never sported those little caps until nearing their sixties, but a matron would have just as soon sat down at her dinner table wearing a kitchen apron, as to be seen without her dainty lace cap which was perched rather coquettishly on the very top of her massed hair.

Louisa came through from the kitchen, a glass jug of fresh creek water in her hands.

"Mother, they are coming. May I go through and put this on the table?"

"Of course, Sweet, I'll come too. I hear their voices."

William was just now outside the front door. Laura hurried along the little hall and met the visitors as they entered. After greeting them both she took Miss Squires into her bedroom where she removed her outdoor things.

"It is lovely to get these off," the girl signed as she laid them across the foot of the big white-counterpaned bed. "It was so hot walking here, I wished I had left my coat behind."

Laura sympathised with her. "It always does seem hotter just before the sun sets," she said. "Later on, when a soft mist rises from the river, you will notice the air much cooler. You'll need a coat then. We often put a match to the fire in the evenings as they grow so cool."

They both chatted for a few minutes before entering the diningroom. Laura excused herself and went out to dish up the dinner and see to the younger children who were already sitting round the table set for them in the kitchen.

Charles helped her to carry the dishes in, and it was not long before they were seated round the table and doing justice to Laura's cooking. Louisa and Charles took turns in helping Laura to put the dishes on the table, and dined with the grown-ups, always, as their parents wished them to be able to mix with their elders at an early age and to shed childish awkwardnesses. As the other children grew in years they would be promoted in the same way.

So no matter who the visitor was, whether the magistrate of the district, a visiting clergyman, or any other dignitary, the two took their places at the table and learnt some of the graces of daily life in an easy manner.

Miss Squires as a very high-spirited young woman, and the table was soon surrounded by merry faces, and a sense of enjoyment spread through the room.

After dinner the little ones went into the room to speak to the visitors and to amuse themselves while Laura and Louisa washed and dried the dishes and tidied the kitchen. Miss Squires came out before all was done, taking the tea-towel from Louisa so that she could join the others in the dining room.

Laura and her guest became very friendly and were a little sorry when they had finished as they found they had much in common.

Miss Squires had just left her home in a flourishing town, and some of her experiences made Laura feel a little homesick for her girlhood days and the pretty home in New Plymouth.

Taking off her apron and hanging it behind the kitchen door, Miss Squires said impulsively, "I think you're just lovely! We must see more of each other. Will you mind if I come again very soon?"

Laura laughed with pleasure. "I hope you will come again very soon. You came fairly often when we first met and then your time seemed to be otherwise occupied. Don't wait to be asked."

The girl had flushed at her words and followed Laura out. As they entered the other room the men sprang to their feet and placed chairs for them.

"Cards tonight?" said William to Laura, looking enquiringly at her.

"No cards tonight," she replied promptly. "Miss Squire does not play so we'll just play some parlour games when I've helped put the little ones to bed."

So the evening was spent in old-fashioned games like "Consequences," "Charades," "Pick the Author" and others.

After a light supper the others left. Mr Holt looked very proud and happy at the thought of escorting such an attractive girl home, while Miss Squires exclaimed that she had enjoyed herself so much that she'd look forward immensely to another visit.

William and Laura sat for a while over the dying embers of the fire, while the elder children said 'goodnight' and went excitedly to their rooms. They had greatly enjoyed the evening's fun and games.

"Isn't it strange how we enjoy a little fire in the evenings." said Laura, "when the days are so dreadfully hot!"

"There is always a cool draught across the valley at night." William answered, suppressing a wide yawn. "Did you like the young lady as much as you hoped to do?"

Laura answered promptly. "I think she is very sweet but I fancy she could be very determined if she wanted her own way. I wonder if she is really in love with Mr Holt, or if she is just enjoying a light flirtation while she is visiting her sister."

William frowned. He was winding the clock, a signal that he was sitting up no longer. "I sincerely hope not. Holt is far too good for that sort of thing. I thought she may make a very suitable wife for him--- later, of course, when they know each other better."

His wife looked at him with a bright twinkle. "How long did you know me ----- before you wondered whether I'd make a suitable wife or not?"

William lit the bedroom candles and extinguished the hanging lamp as he replied.

"My dear, that was a very different thing. Are you ready, Dear? We shall never wake in the morning."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It was on the following afternoon when Laura was busy putting the dinner on, that she heard someone at the front door. Opening it, she was surprised to see Mr Holt standing on the bottom step.

"Oh! How'd you do, Mr Holt," she said, "I'm very sorry that William is away. It is his afternoon to go to Taheke."

"Yes, Mrs Tobin, I know," he replied haltingly, his face flushed and his manner diffident. "Do you mind if I talk to you for a few moments? I know he would be away but I don't mind if you tell him later what I came for."

Surprised at his words Laura took him into the sittingroom. He, after a few moments hesitation, told her why he had come.

"You see, it is this way, Mrs Tobin. I'm in love with the little lady, but I don't know how to tell her. I have never felt like this before. I wondered if you would very kindly tell me how to begin -----seeing that you've been through it all," he ended lamely.

Laura smothered an impulse to laugh, always seeing the funny side of anything, whether meant to be funny or not. She thought that Miss Squires was not so little, being much taller than herself, but she must give some useful advice.

"I really don't quite know," she said sincerely, "You must watch your chance and plunge in before you begin to feel nervous. If she looks receptive --- well, I'd just say whatever I could to make her understand."

"I have wondered---sometimes---if she knows I care for her." he spoke slowly as though feeling his way. "But she is so full of laughter and joy--- that I never know. How shall I begin?"

Laura thought for a few minutes. "I'd wait until she was in a quiet mood. Then I'd jump in at once and say everything I want to say. How much she is loved and adored---that sort of thing. Then I'd tell her that I love her so much that I'd beg her on my knees to be kind. Oh! Anything at all, as long as she knows what you mean."

His face brightened as he listened carefully. "I can do that. I must remember what you say and be ready at once. I do hope she'll listen. I never thought I'd be so soft over any woman, but there it is. I---I feel that she is meant for me when I leave her but with her I am tongue-tied. Foolish, but quite true."

Laura and Mr Holt chatted for a few moments. Then he rose to go. "I cannot thank you enough," he said gravely, as he took her hand in farewell. "If she says no, I'll sell up and go away at once. I couldn't stay."

Laura's face was troubled. "I hope not, Mr Holt, the district could not do without you. The children everywhere adore you. I know mine do, and as for William, he says you are one of the few men the place could not spare."

He thanked her for her kind words and advice. "Believe me, when I say I'll never forget your kindness. I'll remember what you said and try to carry it out. You seem to know so much that I felt I had to come and see you."

With other protestations of gratitude the young man hurried out. The children were playing on the little lawn at the foot of the flower garden, but he did not notice them.

His mind was concentrated upon Laura's advice, and he was wondering when and where he could propose to the dear girl. His heart sank as he climbed the track over the hill on the way to his home near the swing bridge, when he pondered upon the possibility of being refused.

Laura returned to the kitchen, thinking that Mr Holt must have been agitated when he walked the two miles up the valley, instead of catching his horse and riding the distance.

The children had their dinner the same time as usual, when they found that William and Charles were not in sight from the hilltop in the Hales' land. The children had run up to see, as it was possible to see quite a distance down the road.

Laura helped the children with some homework and was beginning to feel quite worried when the dog, Ben, began to bark from his kennel down the garden.

She had put the wayfarers' dinner away to keep hot, hoping they would return before it was spoilt. In a few moments William arrived saying that Charles was giving Ben some bones which the butcher had given for his pet. Laura knew that Charles enjoyed any excuse for petting the dog before he had his own dinner.

Seated at table, William told them all why he and Charles had been delayed on their way home.

About two miles before the road reached the cutting leading downwards into Taheke, there was a small Maori settlement near some tall blue-gum trees. Knowing that William was always on the road near their home on Wednesday afternoons, a Maori woman had waited on the road for him to pass. Her husband was very ill and she hoped William would look in on him when going home. As a general rule, if a Maori family needed William's ministrations, a man would bring a horse for him if the kainga was over three miles away. William was known so far and so widely for his kindness to those in trouble, that Maoris came to him from near and far. He was known among them as the "walking teacher" as they knew that a white man would spend half an hour to catch a horse if he had to go five minutes walk away. Or, so they always said. They thought William kept his horse for a pet, as they saw him so often walking over the countryside with his elder children, or one of them, for company.

William left Charles at the roadside while he accompanied the woman to the sick man's bedside. Diagnosing the trouble as a thick chest cold, he told the woman to meet him at the same place on his return from the store. He would buy the necessary medicines, and he trusted her husband would soon recover. If he did not, she knew where William lived, and he would call at once.

He joined Charles and they hurried on their way home.

While William and Laura were talking across the table, the children were hanging around Charles who was trying to eat while he, at the same time, related little points of interest that he had noticed in Taheke. William and Laura had become used to carrying on a conversation while the children talked to each other in a lower key. In that way, peace and happiness reigned at the table and all were happy.

After homework was finished and books put away Charles and George sat with their parents while the girls monopolised the wash-room. There were no such conveniences as a bathroom provided for the teachers' homes in these early days and William had fitted one end of the scullery as a bathroom. In that way, work was strenuous for those in the home, all water had to be carried in and then carried out again.

Presently the two boys went off to prepare for bed and they could be heard whistling softly as they undressed.

"One would never think that Charles had such a long day and that long walk on top of everything," remarked Laura. "He is always so light-hearted and happy, so good to George always. No wonder the children adore him."

"Yes, he is a fine youngster," replied William with pride. "G-J was saying that the teacher told him that Charles's manly attitude to life has a very good influence among the upper classes."

"I remember Mr Symonds saying something of the same sort to me," said Laura. "At the time, I thought he was trying to please a fond mamma, but if he told Mr G-J he must have really meant what he said. Some people say anything to please, sometimes."

"Mr Symonds is far from being that sort of man," said William, shaking his head in reproof. "If he said it, he meant it."

Laura laughed. "Well, you see more of him than I do. As a rule he seems shy with women. He certainly spoke very highly of Charles that day. I suppose I should withdraw my first remark, to be honest to him."

After a few moments of silence, Laura told William about Mr Holt's visit.

William was interested. "I hope she does accept Holt," he said hopefully. "We don't want to lose him now, and I believe he meant what he said to you."

"Oh, he did," cried Laura earnestly. "I felt so sorry for the poor man. It will be too dreadful if she has only been trifling with his affections, but I feel sure she enjoys his company."

"Why not ask her here again, and see what she is really like," suggested William, as he rose and put the guard before the dying fire. "It is almost time, Laura, to do without our evening fire. What do you think?"

"Yes, I suppose we'll have to stop them soon. It is so nice to have a glow in the fireplace when the lights are on."

Soon all lights went out and the quiet house settled down to a few hours of gentle repose in its setting of fragrant blossoms and green hedges.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Life went on in almost the same routine week by week. The card evenings each Tuesday and Thursday were only varied by an occasional change in whist partners. Mr G-J arrived punctually each Thursday evening, a few moments before dinner was ready for the table, but if Will or Alf could not accompany him, the young men arranged that Mr Symonds would take the vacant seat. Mr Holt still adhered, but spasmodically, to the programme, always remembering to send an excuse when visiting Mrs Johnnes instead, so that Charles could take his place at cards. Laura thought the young man's heart was elsewhere when he did come, as he appeared to be nervous and absentminded.

One evening, when the rubbers were over and supper on the table, Laura managed to speak quietly to Mr Holt under cover of the excited discussion on trouble in the Balkans.

"I have Miss Squires coming to spend the day on Saturday, Mr Holt. I thought that perhaps you would like to come up early in the afternoon and stay to dinner. She will have someone to see her home at night," said Laura, with a twinkle.

He blushed and glanced quickly at the others but they were all interested in the argument, so said hurriedly.

"How kind you are, Mrs Tobin. I never get her to myself these days." Laura smiled sweetly. "Well, I shall send her into the garden to amuse herself while I tidy up after lunch. I'll see the children are away elsewhere----playing at the creek, perhaps---and William will be away directly after lunch because of the sickness among the Maoris. If you come early and go straight through the shrubs until you find her, you will not be interrupted."

He knew that Miss Squires loved a rustic bench under the macrocarpa tree by the stile. It was a sweet and shady nook, with the flowers near, a riot of colour. He looked his gratitude as Laura moved away, noticing the discussion dying down. She sometimes told the men that when they argued over political questions, the room seemed like an Irish meeting with all speaking at once.

The men were amused, but all loved their arguments, each being a great reader and hoping to place his own interpretation of world events before the others. Anyway, they all enjoyed their evenings.

Dawn broke on Saturday with blue skies and soft variable breezes, fluttering the trees in the garden. Laura and William were astir early. He wished to do some gardening while the day was cool and Laura planned to get her work all done during the morning so that she would be free most of the afternoon. The girls prepared the vegetables for the dinner that night, and they were put away in a cool safe hanging beneath the maple trees which they had planted when they first came to the valley, and their spreading branches afforded grateful shade during summer, while the gorgeous autumn leaves in their colourful array decorated the winter vases, and were admired by all visitors to their widely-flung door.

Charles took George off to the manuka flat where they got all their wood so the whole family was happily at work when Miss Squires arrived soon after eleven o'clock.

"I hope I am not too early, Mrs Tobin?" she cried gaily. "I did long to have a good chat with you today."

"You couldn't come too early today. We are free on Saturdays. Come with me into the new garden which William has made over the stile. I am taking him some lemonade and we'll both enjoy some as well. Would you care for some cake? It is some time before we'll have lunch."

"Not for me, thankyou," laughed the girl, taking the large jug from Laura, "I have to watch my figure, you know."

They both crossed the stile and stepped into the garden made by fencing a portion of the school ground that was never used by the pupils. William was at the far end, but waved and put down his rake, coming across to meet them.

They sat on the grass beneath a tall ash tree and Laura filled the glasses.

"Light refreshment!" said she, holding her glass aloft. "A happy day!"

Miss Squires blushed becomingly as she bowed her thanks. "I am sure to have one," she returned. "You people make one feel so welcome - so wanted."

"That is as it should be," said William, noticing the blush, and wondering if she had guessed that Mr Holt would be along later.

"You are always welcome here."

"And wanted, too," Laura smiled at her guest. "I do try to make people enjoy themselves when they come, but one never knows if they do or not. It is sweet of you to say such nice things."

They enjoyed a little quiet banter, and then William returned to his raking, the women went inside, Laura to fuss over the luncheon table, - while Miss Squires looked through some treasured albums of photographs that stood on a side table.

The little girls came in quietly, one after the other, and sat on the sofa before the window. They admired this bright girl who joked and played with them. Laura had seen her playing marbles with Charles and the bigger children one day when she was busy inside, and the sight of the sweet-faced girl playing so merrily and so naturally had warmed her heart towards her.

Miss Squires put down the album and crossed to the sofa. She said, picking little Constance up and seating her on her lap as she sat down between the two elder girls. "May I sit here and talk?"

Laura saw them all engrossed with something that the girl was amusing them with, so she went into the kitchen and finished the salad she had been making when her guest arrived.

As soon as lunch was over, William excused himself and got his satchel containing some medical supplies and hurried away to see his patients several miles away.

Charles and George were going fishing for eels in the creek, so they went off carrying a tin of worms and their fishing tackle.

"Will they be safe?" asked Miss Squires, watching the boys go through the back gate. "Don't you mind them playing by the water?" It must be very deep in places."

Laura agreed. "There is one hole that the Maoris say is bottomless. However, Charles can swim well and he knows they are not to fish anywhere other than where his father has shown him. I'd trust the boys anywhere together. They are both so absolutely dependable." She turned to the girls who were lingering near their fascinating Miss Squires.

"Now, girls, you have a good hour in which to tidy up your doll's village among the rushes. When they are beautifully tidy, perhaps you may ask Miss Squires to see over it."

So the little girls went away to the patch of rushes in the paddock where they had made dolls' houses by tying the tops of rushes together. Laura took the girl's arm and led her along the path to the stile.

"I've brought some magazines for you, while I finish up inside. No, you cannot help me any more, dear, you have been very good in wiping the dishes. I'm sorry to leave you alone here, but it is cooler than inside."

After a few half-hearted remonstrances the girl sank down on the low seat, a magazine on her knee, and her eyes dreamily watching a bed of waving poppies.

As Laura returned to the house, she, too, wondered if the girl thought that Mr Holt would find her presently, sitting in the cool shade beneath the dark green leaves of the macrocarpa tree.

About a quarter of an hour later the side gate creaked as Mr Holt came through into the garden.

He remembered Laura murmuring that he was not to trouble to come to the house, so found his way immediately through the shrubs to the spreading tree.

Miss Squires looked up with a startled cry as he stood before her. "Oh! Mr Holt!-----did you come to see me?"

He pulled a large white silk handkerchief quickly from his pocket, spread it at her feet and, pulling up the knees of his trousers, sank down upon his knees on it. Then he took both her hands in his, and bent his head over them. He tried, in his embarrassment, to remember everything Laura had told him to do. He felt that his fate depended upon it.

"My love! My love!" he murmured, caressing her fingers. "I love you as woman was never loved before. My beautiful one!"

Now, all thoughts of an outside influence was swept aside by the force of his feelings. All shyness left him.

"My lovely one, will you marry me? Don't answer me quickly. I think my heart will break if you say you cannot return my love. Oh! My sweet darling." He bowed his head on her hands and she felt him tremble.

How shy she felt as she listened to his impassioned words. He was so wonderful, so like a knight of old! She had never imagined any man loving her so much that he would kneel at her feet. He was like a hero from an old romance. She withdrew her fingers and said, as he raised his head to see her reply in her eyes. "Mr Holt!"

He spoke quickly. "My dear----my beautiful one. Do you think you could really love me? I love you more than life itself."

And there we shall draw a veil over the rest-----. Not so, Louisa and Freddie, as all called her now.

The two girls had left the wee sister, Constance, playing in the paddock, promising to return and bring her an apple or some dates. They thought they would find Miss Squires in the spot she loved and have a chat before going in for the fruit. Creeping along the path, still hidden by the shrubs, and intending to jump out at her as a surprise, they heard voices. They stood still and parted the branches before them to see who was speaking.

Forgetting that it was rude to listen to people talking together and deeply interested, they watched Mr Holt spread his handkerchief on the ground and sink upon his knees.

When they heard him say in a desperate voice, "Will you marry me?" Louisa looked meaningly at Freddie. They both crept away silently. A few moments later they burst in through the back door and rushed in to where Laura was enjoying an English paper.

"Oh! Mumsy," said Louisa in a stage whisper. "Mumsy, he said 'Will you marry me? He did, too.'"

"Yes, he did," chimed in Freddie, "He put his hanky on the ground and then he knelt to say his prayers."

"No, no he didn't," corrected Louisa. "He forgot to say them. He put his head on her lap and said, 'Marry me, sweet darling.'"

"Hush, hush, children" admonished Laura, who thought she knew what had happened. "You should not listen to grown-ups talking together. It was very rude and naughty. I've told you so before."

"But they didn't see us," exclaimed Louisa, "truly, Mother. We crept away and I am sure they did not hear a sound."

"Well, if you heard it, that is done, but never speak about it to anyone. Now mind!" and Laura held up her forefinger to emphasise her words. "Not a word to anyone. Not to anyone."

The children were then reprimanded for leaving little Constance alone in the rush patch down the slope. They ran away, feeling ashamed for having listened, but with an apple and some dates for themselves and for the little one.

Laura then smoothed her hair, straightened her cap and put on a pair of ear-rings which had belonged to her mother. Then she sat down with her paper, waiting for the couple to appear.....

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

At dinner that night all the family dined with the grown-ups, as Laura thought the young couple would not be so embarrassed as they would be with only the elder ones. So the meal was a merry one, as the young ones prattled without bringing any reproof upon themselves and Charles and his father discussed fishing, occasionally hearing an ejaculation from Mr Holt who thought he was disguising his excitement well. The young girl toyed with her food, scarcely speaking, but sometimes raising her downcast eyes to smile at the children.

In trying to cover the young people's silence, Laura and William had allowed the young ones to get out of hand, and towards the end of the meal everyone was startled to hear the two youngest, Constance and Eleanor, beat time on the cloth to a song which they now shouted in loud voices. They subsided into giggles as Laura jumped up and lifted them down from the table.

"Come on, children. That was really too much noise. Come with me and get ready for bed. You girls can clear the table for me, and don't disurb the grown-ups."

Miss Squires was in a golden dream of surprise at having captured the love of such a marvellous young man, that she sat on at the table, crumbling some bread and toying with a spoon.

Louisa and Freddie, noticing her absent-mindedness, crept past her chair and removed the dinner dishes very quietly, while the two men excused themselves and went out into the cool night air. They paced the path before the windows for a couple of hours, talking together.

Charles could not engage Miss Squires' attention for longer than a few seconds at a time, so he, too, tip-toed softly out and joined his mother who was drying the youngest while Constance was blowing bubbles in the bath.

"Mother," Charles began, "excuse me, but do you mind if I go to bed and read my book? I haven't a chance anywhere, it is not quiet enough, and George went to bed halfway through dinner. Was he sick?"

"No, dear," returned his mother, ruffling Constance's dark silky hair with the towel, as she had finished Eleanor and put on her dressing-gown. "He was not sick, but he had eaten some apples just before dinner and lost his appetite. I suppose he had felt neglected and found the apples. Anyway, I told him he could slip away."

"Oh! That's all right, then," Charles, relieved in his mind about his brother, was anxious to return to his first question. "I won't disturb him if I read. I'll shade the light from him."

"Very well, darling," answered his mother, kissing him lightly on his cheek. "I think you are very wise to get off early. You have both tramped around all day. Put out the light if you feel sleepy, otherwise read until I come to tuck you both up."

With a few more words, Charles went off to get his night-shirt and sponge-bag. He was so subdued that his mother guessed that he was disturbed at the two young people's quiet and unusual behaviour at the table. They were generally so lively and full of jokes that they kept all the table gurgling with mirth, but tonight their gaiety seemed to have fled. The children adored Mr Holt, and could not understand his silence.

When Laura returned to the sitting room, she found her friend sitting stiffly on the sofa. She jumped up when Laura entered and exclaimed prettily.

"I am so sorry that I have not been a polite guest tonight. I let you do everything and never once offered to help. It was really because--- Mr Holt asked me to call him Gerald!"

"That will be very friendly for you both," replied Laura with a smile. "He is such a lonely man, where women are concerned, that I am glad for his sake."

"But---that is not all," stammered the girl, blushing. "He asked me to marry him!"

Laura took the radiant girl in her arms and kissed her warmly. "My dear, I do hope you said "yes?" He is such a charming man that I'm sure you will both be very happy-----if you care for him, too."

Miss Squires was touched by Laura's sincerity and said very slowly, "I do, very much indeed. It has been so sweet of you to have me so often and I couldn't feel happier anywhere than when I am here, unless I have a little home of my own." Gerald is so wonderful... I can hardly believe he cares so much for me. He is such a princely sort of young man."

The word 'princely' rather captivated Laura's imagination, but she replied soberly, "My dear girl, it has been shining from his eyes for many a day. I think from the first time you met. He is a lonely man, and although a man's man, he does need a woman to care for."

They were then seated side by side on the sofa, Miss Squires sighed and remarked simply, "I have always been a lonely girl, too. Oh, yes, I have friends elsewhere, but I never met anyone like Gerald before. So true---so---sincere---and, really, well, a love of a man!"

They both laughed and that broke the tension. The girl talked on quietly about her life in the small city, and her hopes of a happy future now that Gerald loved her.

After an intimate chat they both went into the kitchen and prepared supper, before calling the two men.

It was really surprising to see how bright and merry they were then. The dinner-table restraint had flown and the young couple were delightfully frank about their happiness.

When William turned out the lamp before taking up their candlesticks, he said, "Well, Laura, all's well that ends well. That little courtship is progressing well and we shall have a couple to invite here, instead of a lonely man who was glad to feel our home life around him."

Laura agreed sleepily. She thought the two had gone off after supper with happy smiles and light footsteps. "It will be so nice," she murmured, "the children are so fond of them both and everyone will be pleased."

Everyone in the district, however, did not feel so delighted a few weeks later. Miss Squires was returning to her own home in a few days and a week later, Mr Holt was following her. They were to be married and after that their plans were hazy. He wished to bring her home and thought they could live happily where he had spent the last few years. It was said that 'she' did not wish to settle down in Taheke. She thought they would be happier if he made a clean break with his life there and settled in a place that would be new to both. Rumours flew round the countryside but no one knew anything as neither Mr Holt nor his intended had spoken of their future plans.

Miss Squires came to bid farewell to Laura and William and she kissed the girls warmly. She hoped to see them again some day and spoke gratefully of the very fine clock that the district had presented to Mr Holt. She also thanked them very prettily for having helped her and her loved one in many kind ways.

Laura did not ask about their future plans and Miss Squires did not volunteer any information, so when she had gone they were no wiser for having seen her.

A few days later Mr Holt came to bid farewell. After talking quietly outside for some time to William, the latter brought his friend in and said, "Laura, this young man thinks he will be leaving us for good. It is to go no further now, but he will be back again later to see the last of us."

William's pleasantry failed to bring a smile to Mr Holt's grave face, and as Laura looked sorrowfully at the young man he took her hand and said earnestly, "I shall always be most grateful for all you have done, but what Tobin says is true. I shall be very sorry to leave this place, but with a changed life many other changes are inevitable."

Laura told him how sad they all felt about it. The children had heard rumours at Sunday school, and had been very quiet and sorrowful ever since.

William echoed her words. He said "Of course you know, Holt, that you will not be forgotten. There will always be a welcome in our home, wherever we are, for you and your wife. Promised, I should have said; I hope it will not be a parting of the ways."

"I sincerely hope not," said the young man, gripping his hand. "I love this district and there are many fine people in it, but, as I said before, self must not come first."

Within a few weeks, the whole countryside knew that Mr Holt's farm was up for sale. Rumours were banded about, but no one knew why the young couple were settling elsewhere, although there were a thousand and one surmises, even Mrs Johnnes knew nothing at all. No one knew, until Mr Holt sought William out after the sale was over and he was on the point of leaving to join his young wife.

"I am telling you, Tobin, because you have always been such a fine friend to me. And I wish you to tell the two G-Js, after your wife knows, but not the members of either family, because young people cannot let anything slip if they know nothing."

"Are you certain you wish to say anything at all to any of us?" enquired William, with deep sympathy for the complete reversal of his friend's plans.

"Of course. It is due to you both as you have always been the real kind of friends---as safe as houses. My little girl thinks we'll be happier among strangers, as she thinks my allegiance would be divided here between her and my many outside activities. She wants a clean break, and she may be right, I don't know."

William assured him that he would be greatly missed but he had no doubt that, in a new district, life would be more of an adventure if they both began on an equal footing.

The young man was very grave, but seemed to think that there may be something in Tobin's idea.

So the two close friends parted, and William felt the loss for many a long day. Mr Holt had been well brought up and in a very nice circle, so they had always found a great deal of interest in their friendship and although William had now a growing family, only a few years divided the two men.

Laura never knew what passed between William and Mr G-J, on the subject. She had told Mrs G-J about Mr Holt's wish that they should be told his farewell remarks, and they both felt that the young girl may have resented his popularity in the district. She probably believed that his outside activities in the church and countryside would some day draw him from her. Laura and her friend both enjoyed the girls' reaction to the scene by the stile. They were like sisters, the two women, and kept little from each other, but neither passed anything on to other people. As Mrs G-J said to Laura once, when they spoke of sharing secrets, "You and I are friends and I never use that word lightly, and we never delve into the things that our husbands discuss, and I think we can believe they would expect us to be just the same---share all and say nothing elsewhere. It is not natural not to have an outlet."

"I think you are right about friendship. One has to be so careful what one says to the ordinary type of person, and it is lovely to be able to speak without wondering whether one should say this or that. William feels that your husband means the same that he does, and I always know that I can tell you anything."

Mrs G-J answered, "We can always trust each other, and few can say that."

Laura told her of the literal way that the young man had taken her remarks about "going on my knees" to gain one's objective, and they both enjoyed the children's remarks about him "saying his prayers."

"I'm sure they have forgotten it now," said Laura, "and I was glad that they were not older, or they would have probably repeated it to their girl friends, and one never knows where that sort of thing ends. I've often enjoyed the light side of that episode when I have been alone, and I am sure the memory of that handkerchief will often amuse me, so we'll be able to enjoy the memory together."

The two women laughed gently, and it was strange how often the sight of a large handkerchief reminded them both in after life of the delightful couple by the stile under the macrocarpa tree, with the bed of many coloured flowers scenting the air, while they waved their leaves in the sunshine.

The two friends did not know that they were never to see or hear of those charming people again, although many in the district found their days brightened by the memory of that delightful summer romance.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

After the departure of the Holts a change had to be made in the running of the church services and the Sundayschool. As no one volunteered to accept Mr Holt's duty Sundays, and no one that was asked would accept, William had to fill the breach, so it went on in that way, until he left the district.

As for Sunday school, Mrs G-J ran the whole undertaking. She was a tall, handsome woman with a fine figure, and was much admired by the white settlers.

Her two elder daughters helped by taking junior classes, and the babies were well supervised. By babies, the class of three to five years was so designated. Mrs G-J was responsible for collecting funds round the district for the annual Sunday school picnic and when they gave the religious concert of the year, she acted as producer. She was so busy with her extra Sunday work that she told her friend, Laura, she was proud to have such willing and efficient daughters. They were good cooks at an early age and could hold their own with many a well-known chef. The youngest girl was fond of outdoor work and helped on the land. In later years she would have been known as a 'lahd girl'.

Will had a fine workshop in which he did a great deal of fine cabinet work. He excelled in the making of violins and they sold well all over the North Island at a good figure. Made mainly from rewarewa wood, that beautifully grained native honey-suckle tree wood, they attracted the attention of beauty-lovers everywhere.

The G-J's home was built on a knoll in a clearing surrounded by heavy timber, and overlooked a tidal river running down the valley far below. A pretty fern-bordered track led downhill through the bush to the river-side and for years the family used the river water for most household purposes.

Will, with his inventive mind, had fixed a strong cable from a tall bush-tree not far from their backdoor steps and it ran or was suspended down to the river bank. There a bucket, hooked on the top end of the cable, rushed down and submerged itself in the deep water at the river's edge. It was easily drawn upwards to its starting place. It was most exciting to watch the bucket swing down the steep sloping bank over the tops of tall forest trees and Will received much commendation from outsiders for his ingenuity.

When the Tobin family spent a day at the G-J's home, as they usually did twice every Christmas vacation, George and Freddie used to wonder what their feelings would be if they climbed into the bucket and swung themselves out over those tree-tops to the water's edge. It was the thought of ^{the} swift plunge into the waters that deterred them from attempting the descent. Fortunately for their parents' peace of mind, no one knew that the two children had even considered the question. That was always kept as a close secret to be locked away among the memories labelled "What we never did."

The G-J family's time to spend their return "day" at Otatau was always eagerly looked forward to by the young ones, when much time passed in games by the creek.

Through the years at the G-J's, paddocks had been made in different parts of the heavily bushed section, but on three sides of the house, gardens and orchard had been made and those and the back of the house were surrounded by beautiful native bush, with tracks running through in all directions to other large clearings. The back of the house over-

looked the valley below and there was not much room there for any garden as the ridge began immediately and ran down to the water's edge.

It was a paradise of beauty to the Tobin children when they spent a day there. They wandered happily along the many tracks that were graced by dainty ferns and mosses. Tall tree-fern, or pongas, were a delight to the eye, and they loved the brilliant rata blossoms so far above them, brightening the sombre branches of the tall trees. Big tawa trees dropped their large purple berries and the young ones searched for them among the mosses and fallen leaves.

A few years before Mr G-J had a huge log thrown across the river, to form a dam, below the swing bridge. The day it was to be put across the water was a red-letter one and people of all ages gathered to see the Maoris with their bullocks manipulating the log until it lay across the river in the very position that was required. At that stage of his growth, George admired bullock-drivers and their teams more than anything he had ever seen. He exclaimed that he would be a bullock-driver when he grew up and stood a lot of teasing, good-naturedly. The nearest he ever came to realising his childish ambition --- long forgotten --- was in his early manhood when he drove a mule team on a big sheep station on the East Coast, for a short period, before taking up his settled career which was unfortunately cut short by the World War I. He joined up with a regiment from Hauraki and went across to France when he went immediately into the trenches, and was killed early next morning when his platoon went 'over the top'. But that is looking too far forward into the next century.

To return to the dam that was in the process of being made, everybody agreed that the bullocks were a very pretty sight, and when the log was lying across the river from bank to bank, sightseers left for their homes and the workers decided to do no more until the next day.

The dam took some time in the making. Workers piled great boulders and branches, and debris until the dam gradually became ship-shape and Mr G-J installed a corn-mill. It had been a dream of his for some years back to instal a mill that could be run by water power and it proved to be a great asset to the district as long as he needed to keep it going. People brought corn which was ground into maize flour, which, when mixed with wheat flour made a deliciously flavoured nutty bread. It was quite an industry for some years until the pressure of other industries on the farm caused the mill to go out of use.

Further up the settlement, past Mr Holt's one-time farm, the land on each side of the road was run by a family called Baker. There was a large family of grown-up sons, some in their teens and several daughters. It was delightful to go down the road from Otawa on an early summer morning and see a crowd of busy haymakers at work on every side. Fertile river flats, the farm was a show place for the district.

A niece of Mrs Baker's came to stay with her aunt for a holiday. She had the beautiful complexion that was known as special to Taranaki and which was supposed to owe its beauty to the soft climate of that day, when heavy bush still covered much of the province.

I forget the name of the niece, but she later stormed the heart of a young teacher who boarded at the farmhouse and they married and later left the district. This teacher had a marvellous baritone voice which, forty years later, would have brought him worldwide renown. Good voices were lost in those days, when there was no radio, and they could only be appreciated in their own home districts.

The young man, Mr Bear, took the young people of the place in hand. He held choir practice through the week and the church services were brightened by a colourful choir of, in many cases, some very fine voices.

The first church organist had been an Ada Marriner, whose parents were the very respected owners of the Taheke Hotel.

She was a great rider and was mostly seen about in a well-cut riding habit and usual black hat. A great favourite everywhere, she was a constant visitor at the Otawa schoolhouse, where the family adored her for her pretty face and charming manners. She was about twenty-five then, and

reputed to have gently discouraged several eligible would-be suiters.

Louisa and Freddie were playing near the garden hedge one Saturday afternoon when William and Mr G-J were pacing the garden path close by and talking quietly together. Suddenly the girls heard the name of Ada Marriner mentioned. They stopped playing to hear what was being said about their beloved charmer.

"Yes," said William, "She is getting on, I should say. A most attractive girl but I fear will soon find herself on the shelf if she continues to prefer her own way to any excellent chance offering."

The little girls did not listen to any more. They slipped away and climbed the stile into their father's vegetable garden. Sitting down in their own special hidey-hole under a drooping ash tree they looked at each other with apprehensive eyes.

"What did Daddy mean when he said she would be on a shelf? It sounds so stupid. How can she get on a shelf?" asked Freddie.

"I don't know, - Mummy would only say 'listening again?' if we asked her. I don't know what excellent offers he means, but she may not know about the shelf. If we see her by ourselves, could we tell her about it?"

"She may be angry that we know. If I get excellent offers when I grow up I'll take them all, but I don't know what they would be for. Still I suppose we'll find out later," said Freddie.

"Next time she comes, if we see her for a moment, we could ask her what Father meant, and she might talk about it. She may be glad to know what people say." So the two girls hung round Miss Marriner next time she called, but found no chance to tell her about the danger that was hanging over her head. So---in their prayers they asked that their friend should learn about her danger in preferring her own way to any other. If it were something that could happen, it must be quite right to mention it in one's prayers, but they often worried for their friend's future. It amused them, a few years later, to learn what the phrase meant and they were pleased they had never talked to Ada Marriner about it!

They knew, too, that girls were marrying then, later than they had ten years before. Partly from economic reasons and partly because it was easier for girls to get positions and to keep themselves. Of course, in the late nineteen thirties and forties many girls did not wish to marry early, no matter how tempting the offer. Education was put within the reach of the child from the poorest home and with a wide education and a good position, many older girls could not be tempted to give up their freedom and independence. Another well recognised truth is that the longer a girl puts the thought of marriage from her, and the more she notices the broken marriages, and the unhappy homes that abound everywhere, the less likely she is to wish to enter the state of matrimony when she has earned a good position and made her own niche in the community. In days to come, a slogan for men wishing to marry, will be "Catch 'em young!" ---as the younger the girl, the more attractive is the thought of marrying someone who will keep her in style, in surroundings that other women may envy. After twentyfive, girls will expect much more in a husband than an attractive personality and 'pots' of money!

While the two little girls were worrying about Ada's future, her parents disposed of the hotel and went down the river to live. Many would-be swains were left languishing and Ada appeared to be as heart-whole as ever when she arrived at the church doors for the last time.

After the service people remained behind and a presentation to her from all the district was made by one of the choir boys. Ada made a pretty little speech and then road away out of their lives, for many were destined never to see her again.

Mrs G-J played the organ then until the new teacher arrived to take the place of the well-loved Mr Symonds.

The new man took the place by storm, accepted the position of organist as Mrs G-J had too many other self-imposed duties on her hands, and the choir proper was formed.

In the meantime, from the pah at Pukerata and from those of some neighbouring tribes an undercurrent of trouble was brewing, hatched by

the resentment caused by the insistence of the police that the collection of the dog-tax had to be annually carried out.

Outwardly, everything went on as before. William visited the sick and was met by grateful relatives; the attendance at the Native school kept up; and Maoris rode leisurely up and down the roads of the district with the appearance of having peace in their hearts and goodwill to all.

The gumfields were flourishing. Storekeepers were growing rich from the trade in kauri gum overseas. There was no need for any man to go hungry or his family to go barefooted, so long as he put up a shack on the gumfields and speared and dug for gum. The old swamplands yielded a rich harvest of gum yearly. The fame of the free and easy life on the gum-fields was noised abroad, and hundreds of Austrians came out to New Zealand to try their luck on the fields.

William thought that fact would ruin the happy and moral lives of the Maoris, as Austrians visited in the Maori pahs and attended the native dances, but life in the Maori settlements buzzed with work in the cropping fields by day and excitement in the dancing halls by night. Through all this the secret undercurrent ran, only known by occasional words carelessly dropped by pupils at the Maori schools, the teacher, apparently, appeared to notice nothing.

Whenever there was a fresh in the river, running through the valley, bushmen from high up on the foothills, guided their huge kauri logs into the current, and then left them to be swirled down for many miles past Taheke and the lower reaches of the river, until they reached the saw-mills at Kohukohu. Many went on down the Hokianga Harbour and over the bar, until being swept along in the ocean current, they finally reached Onehunga.

Life in Hokianga was rich in variety, and beauty met the eyes at every turn and twist of the roads and the river.

One Sunday afternoon when the children reached home after attending school and church, Laura met them at the garden gate with a worried cry that she had lost little Nell.

"She was playing happily by the front door when I went in to put the baby down. Then I fixed up the kitchen fire, and when I went out, Nell had disappeared. I looked all over the place and called in the paddock but there was no sound ---- and then you all came."

Louisa and Freddie ran swiftly to the creek through the back paddock, as they had taken the little one sometimes to the top of the bank, and they had enjoyed the look of wondering astonishment in her blue eyes, at the water flowing lazily below. The two girls were frightened, and fear lent them wings. They ran down the track to the water's edge and skirted the current for a long way, both up and down the creek.

Pausing for breath, they gazed wildly at each other.

"She couldn't have fallen into the water, as it is no clear, and we couldn't miss seeing her," cried Louisa, her face white at the implication her words conveyed.

Freddie looked despairingly at her. "She toddled so slowly, she would never have got as far as this. We'd better go back. Mother won't know where we are."

"Yes, p'raps they found her in Dad's vegetable garden." Holding each other's hands the two ran up the hill again. When they reached the back gate, George was looking for them.

"Where 've you been? I've been looking for you. We found her! We found her!"

He was so excited that he jumped down to emphasise his words. George turned and ran before them and they all hurried into the house. The little girls were panting and their faces were red with their wild exercise.

Laura was sitting on a low seat, with the little girl, Nell, on her lap. The little one was yawning and hardly able to keep awake.

"Here she is, girls!" Before Laura could say more, Constance cried excitedly, "We found her under Mum's bed. Fast asleep, and quite well!"

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Before school broke up at Christmas, 1896, William received a letter, official, which he dreaded to show to Laura. He had brought it home the night before, with the mail which he and Charles always collected on Tuesday evenings at the G-J's. Thinking they would talk it over after breakfast, an interruption came during the meal which drove the letter right out of his mind. George was telling them an amusing anecdote that Mr Hales had told him, when they heard, through the widely flung window, a shot. More shots sounded. They were coming from the direction of the pah.

"Old Wirimu must be dead," said William, as they all rushed outside and began to count ---one---two---three---, until the shots stopped at seventy.

"Why do they always fire shots when someone dies?" asked little Constance, who was very interested.

"They always fire the age of the person, although I have not known of Maoris doing it elsewhere. Then they fire a volley on the grave, which I imagine they learnt from watching out military funerals," explained William, "It is not a traditional custom as they knew nothing about gunpowder at one time."

Constance regarded him with her big dark-grey eyes, though she did not understand his long words. He smiled gently at her.

"You thought the poor old man would not last long," said Laura to her husband as they returned to their neglected breakfast table. "Will you go up later?"

"Yes, immediately after school," he replied gravely, munching some toast. "When I was there yesterday they had removed him to an out-house, so I knew they were as sure about the end as I was. I wish it were possible to have a doctor over before a person dies, but the thirty odd mile journey doesn't encourage that---and then the Maoris would never meet medical expenses. Coming that distance, the charges would be high."

"What do they gain, Father, by putting a patient out of his comfortable bed into a shed outside?" asked Louisa.

"My dear, you know how superstitious they are--they always burn their bedding and clothing, together with the hut in which they die. They think it gets rid of any evil spirit hovering near. So, as they don't wish to burn a good home, they remove the patient to some place that can be more easily spared."

"What a strange idea," commented Louisa, "we were talking about them firing over a grave, the other day, and none of us could think why they should burn the things they died amongst."

"Well, I have told you the reason. I often think the world will grow very prosaic when all strange customs are put away, and the coloured races live as primly as we do," said her father. "There is something strange and picturesque about many native customs that adds a colour and poetical touch that our civilized lives lack sadly."

Knowing that he would have to go to Pukerata that afternoon, William was so busy arranging his day's duties to suit, that he completely forgot about the official letter in his coat pocket in the wardrobe.

Directly after school, he changed his coat and noticed the letter but had no time then so decided to leave it until later on.

The girls were helping their mother to shell peas, while George peeled the potatoes. In that way work was made easy, and they enjoyed many interesting chats when helping to prepare dinner. Laura often improved the shining occasion by working a few moral thoughts in with their harmless chatter, but today everything had gone smoothly, and there was no need for any hidden lecture to be sandwiched between careless remarks.

The girls had been anxious for her to tell them tales of her girlhood, so she had got into the way of telling something interesting when they were all working together. Today they wished to know why their Grandfather Charles Brown had been such a lucky little boy that he was taken to places on the Continent while only a small child.

Laura thought for a few moments and then began,

"I think I had better tell you as my father told me, but I shall never be able to make it as interesting as he did.

"Grandfather Charles Armitage Brown was like your father, he simply adored a long walk, and enjoyed climbing every hill that he ever lived near, so the story of his life is really wrapped up in that. His love of outdoor activities was so great that it pushed away the longing which most men have, that is, to have a home, and a growing family around him. He never found that appeal to him, but as the years passed he often dreamt of having a son who would walk with him over the counties of England, and through the beautiful countries of Europe. I told you the other day about his asking his friend, Keats, to live with him. Well, he was so attached to him that as he knew he wouldn't always have him, the thought of having a son was always with him, but he didn't wish to tie himself up with a woman, and perhaps a big family. I suppose his dreams would never have been realised had they not had an Irish girl who came in every day. She kept everything in order and did the cooking for the two men.

"She must have been attractive to the eye, as many Irish girls are, but she was not at all clever, and was mainly concerned about making a home for herself. Just imagine her thoughts when my Grandfather put his idea before her. He wanted a son, not a wife, but he explained that they would marry quietly and he would provide her with a pleasant little home, and an allowance, but he was to be free to wander where he wished. The son, when old enough, would go with him. He meant to be free to go searching for beautiful scenes and enjoy a life free from entanglements." Laura paused, then said, "Perhaps your father would say that you are too young to understand----"

Louisa interrupted her with, "Mother, we are not really children now. Father forgets we are not small now. It would be different if the little ones were here."

Laura smiled. "I do think your father does try to keep you too childish. Well, I'll hurry and put these peas on, while I finish the tale. Your great-grandmother, as she was, afterwards, was a very sweet and gentle creature, with no worldly knowledge but only an over-mastering longing for a little place of her very own. When it was offered up on a salver, by a gentleman who would leave her much to her own quiet ways, and enough to live on, she accepted those terms. He must have had a great respect for her, to give her his name, but she knew their roads lay far apart. I suppose she weighed everything in her mind, but knowing that she was no real companion for a studious man, she cheerfully accepted his terms. She, and a little home and friends around to suit her simple tastes --- it was a chance she did not pass. Her pride in having a little home to be mistress of in truth, and never having to think again of working in the home of others, must have been a great deal of joy to her. Grandfather Brown was very proud of his little son. I've often wondered what he would have done if she had presented him with a daughter, instead! He was with her, I think, when poor Keats was taken so ill. The poet and the Dilkes were the only ones who knew about his marriage and they kept it a close secret from outsiders, never considering possible reactions later. I have always been so sorry for C.A.B when his wife died so suddenly, as he had not expected to have to take possession of so young a child. But--- dear me, is that really the time? Your father will be here almost immediately. I'll tell more of the old days next time we have half an hour to spare."

Laura had told the family to be very quiet at dinner, because she knew that William was always disturbed, when he had been to the parson arranging the burial details with the relatives of a dead person.

It was not until the young ones were all safely doing their homework around the kitchen table, that he signalled Laura that he wished to talk with her.

She finished what she was doing, then followed him into the sitting-room, wondering why he was so secretive all of a sudden.

When he put the official letter before her on the table, she at once

knew what he was leading up to so mysteriously.

"Oh, William, how dreadful! Have we really to move on again and from this dear place?"

"Open and read it, my dear. I didn't wish you to see it with the family around and there has been no chance all day to give it to you."

As she drew the letter from the long envelope she looked reproachfully at him, "William, you had this all night!"

He looked anxious, "Yes, I got it when the mail came through. It was too late when we reached home. You had your father's letter and others to read."

She glanced down the lines, her face still. Then she said sadly. "I believe you must accept. We have been here a long while and that is sure to go against us if we argue the question. I know they never worried you before to move, because you are so good to the sick Maoris."

He looked quickly at her, "That is only your supposition, dear." Laura shook her head. "No, William. Mr Pope has often given me a hint that I need not worry about moving. But now I remember, the last time he was here he never once referred to it. That never struck me before."

William rose and walked about the room. He filled his pipe and then put it carefully away on the mantelpiece. He sat down again slowly.

"I'm sorry we received that letter. It will be a case of accepting or the next time they offer a school it will be Paddy's promotion."

Laura sighed. "I'm afraid you are right. Let us get that map of North Auckland that Mr Galwraith sent you? We must look the place up. Have you heard of it?"

"No, I have not. I fancy it is somewhere near The Heads, but otherwise I know nothing about it."

He went to the top shelf of the cupboard where he kept his important documents and after a short search, came back to the table with a long roll.

"It was a lucky day for me when Galwraith sent this along," he said as he unrolled it on the table.

"I've forgotten why he sent it, but I remember it coming," answered Laura, as she put down the sewing that she had taken up. She never wasted a moment in the day --- and joined him at the table.

"His brother, the surveyor, you know," he returned, and then paused. Even now it pained him to remember his friend's lonely death in the bush. Then he continued,

"He had some maps that they were discarding, and this was one. So he sent it to his brother in the Post Office, and asked him to let me have it."

"Oh," said Laura, hurriedly, seeing that she had disturbed him, "I remember now."

They both followed the Hokianga River down to the Heads. Then they found Opononi on the beach, and Omapere nearer the pilot station. But Waimamaku they could not find up or down the river.

"It must be somewhere near here," said William, "I remember when Winkelmann was appointed there, but I never looked it up."

However, he crossed the hill behind Omapere with his first finger and found the Waimamaku river marked about three miles or so inland, on the South Coast. South of the harbour.

He was sorry that the height of the hill was not marked in, but he thought it should be a splendid climb for some future day. Then they sat down quietly and discussed the move. They would have to be at the Waimamaku Native school before it re-opened in the New Year.

"The girls will be so upset," said Laura, "They are so fond of the life here and the creek, and walks. Everything. It is too bad to have to leave our lovely garden behind."

William sympathised with her remarks but said that he thought Charles and George would be glad to have a new stamping ground.

"They are boys, and will love the adventure of moving camp. Besides, Charles has never been so attached to the district since he went each year to sit his exams in Auckland."

Laura agreed. "That is because the Aunts Mary and Constance made such a fuss over him, and took him everywhere. I have often thought since that he feels the world is too big for any more time to be wasted in a small place. He longs to go beyond the hills and soon he'll be wishing to leave them behind and cross the ocean. Boys always love changes."

"Well, we Tobins always had wandering feet. Right down the centuries no Tobin has stayed still for long."

Laura joined in with his laughter. "Wandering feet and salt in your veins! So our children can never hope to remain long in any place. They'll wander all their lives, or wish to roam."

William rolled up the map and put it aside. "Life will never be monotonous for them, then," he said.

"If their lives lead them into strange roads and over the hills and far away, I know they will enjoy every minute. There is nothing dull, or ordinary about any of our children."

"So speaks the fond Mamma," laughed William. "Don't let us tell the family until the breaking-up feast is over. They won't enjoy one moment if they know."

He extinguished the lamp and they returned to the kitchen where William corrected the homework. Soon the older ones trooped off to bed. The younger ones had long been asleep.

"Come on, Sweet" said William, "Let's have a hurried cup of coffee and then get off ourselves. We have work to do tomorrow."

The Maori children had their usual breaking-up party and all went home rejoicing, carrying their usual bundles of cake, slices of pudding, sandwiches and even jam tarts with the jammy sides pressed together. Laura said the pastry would crumble carried that way and one cheerful boy replied with a wide smile, "Yes, mam, him sure to break, but in my shirt. I can eat crumbs too. Not lose anything."

As the others agreed Laura allowed them their own way and when the brown paper bags gave out the surplus rice, cake and tarts went straight down into the shirt fronts.

Standing on their path outside the garden gate, as they had done in other places for the same occasion, watching the merry children tear out on to the flats below, Laura and William waved until the last child disappeared from sight in the manuka that bordered the road.

"It was so sweet to hear those wee ones trying to say "Melly Clismass" said Laura, as they both turned towards the garden so scented in the summer breeze and brilliant with gay flowers.

The girls had offered to clear all signs of the picnic and to leave everything shipshape so Laura wandered with William round the flower beds, admiring the dainty flowers of shrubs and annuals, the bright lobelia borders and the ever-faithful friend of woman, the cheerful marigolds holding their faces up to the sun.

"When are you going to break the news to the family, William," Laura asked, as they strolled among the plants so carefully tended since their seedling days.

William drew up, his hand still holding Laura's elbow, "I suppose I should tell them tonight. It is only right that they should know before other people."

"My dear, I am glad you feel as I do, the poor children will think their hearts will break when they leave all their lovely haunts behind."

Charles was sitting on a corner of the table in the kitchen, while the children grouped around him told about the bright spots of the afternoon's activities.

Jumping down when his parents entered, he said gaily, "I wish I had stayed from school today, Mums, and enjoyed the party with you all. You must have an enormous feast for the children. Almost like a farewell party!"

Laura and William glanced quickly at each other. How strange that he should have hit upon the solution of the lavish dainties provided for the Maori children. Almost as though he had second sight!

William took his cue promptly, "That is what your mother and I wish to

Speak to you about. Come into the front room where we can all be comfortable."

Laura praised the children for having everything so spotless.

"It looks so nice. You have tidied up beautifully."

They followed William and Charles into the other room where Charles and George found seats for their mother and sisters. Then they settled themselves beside their father on the window seat. There was a short silence. Laura looked at her folded hands and waited for William to begin. He cleared his throat once or twice and looked round at each of the children who were sitting so quietly, and watching him so expectantly.

"I suppose there is no need to break the news so gently. Your mother and I are very sorry, quite as much as any of you will be, when I tell you that we shall be leaving here in about four weeks time."

There was a startled gasp from the group. Then a stream of questions burst upon the quiet room and the children were standing round their parents, imploring to be told everything.

Charles and George sat still, their eager eyes upon their father.

"Sit down girls," William spoke sternly. "Sit down and be quiet, please. How am I to tell you anything when you make such a noise? Be more like your brothers. They are just as anxious to know as you are, but they have more patience."

A little abashed the bigger girls sat down, the small ones following their example. George sat still but glanced at Charles who was taking no notice of the others. However, he caught George's glance and grinned boyishly.

When the room was quiet, William told them that he had accepted the headmastership of the native school at Waimamaku. Then he and Charles pinned the map on the wall, and they were now tracing the route they would follow to get there.

It seemed wonderful to the children to think of going to Opononi by launch. Charles was the only one of the family to have been in a launch as his father had included him in a fishing trip to Rawene only a few months ago. One or two of the other men had taken a son along, and the boys had thoroughly enjoyed the outing.

Laura watched the children as they clustered eagerly round the map. She knew that the realisation of all they were leaving behind would not strike them until later. Charles and George had often talked of seeking adventures in the outside world, so, although they were very fond of their friends and loved the beautiful valley, they were quite calm about moving on to fresh pastures. In fact, they were intrigued by the knowledge that they would make new friends and see another part of the country.

William explained to them all that he was not anxious to leave, but the move had certain advantages that he could not disregard. The school was much larger than that of the Otatau school, where the numbers had fallen during the last two years. Children had passed the higher standards and left. Some to go to work in the white settlement where extra labour was needed on some of the farms. Some to remain in the Pukerata settlement, and a very small minority moving on to Te Aute College for boys and the girls to Te Hukarere College.

William would command a bigger salary and that was all to the family good. He had been at Otatau for a long while. If he did not accept this good offer he would probably be offered a smaller school later on that he would be expected to accept at once. Once a good offer was turned down, no teacher could expect the next one to be in the same street. It generally turned out to be "Paddy's promotion." William paused.

"In other words, go to the bottom of the class," Charles explained to the interested children.

William looked startled, then smiled at Charles and said, "Yes, it would practically amount to the same thing."

He began rolling up the map and put it carefully away. He then sat down again and answered the children's eager questions. He knew they would not feel satisfied if they went to bed without knowing as much about the journey as he could tell them.

"No, I cannot tell you anything about Opononi because I have not been there. If you remember I pointed the place out to you on the map." or,

"Yes, you'll know as soon as I have made arrangements to go. Up until that time, I shall expect you all to help your mother all that you can, to release her for the packing. It will be most wearisome, as it is."

Laura suggested that as it was too late for a cooked dinner, they could have a "scratch" tea of odds and ends.

William told Charles the next morning that he could go down, if he wished, to the G-J's home. There he could tell them about his father's projected move.

"May George walk down with me, Father?", he asked anxiously. "We'll have to make the most of our holidays as they will be the last here."

"Certainly, it will be a pleasant walk for you both. They will be sure to ask you to stay for lunch, but come back this time. Tell the old gentleman that I'll be down early to help with the onion patch."

"Thankyou, Father," replied Charles, shouting to George, "Come along, old man. Put your best foot foremost."

They both ran off in a very merry mood. William went into the house and found Laura.

"I've sent the boys down to the G-J's. I thought it would be easier for me if Charles broke the news, and I'll go down later."

Laura smiled at him, "You knew how much the boys would love to break the news! The poor old man will miss you."

William sighed, "I shall miss him very much. Being late out from Home, we have much in common. Things are changing here. First, Holt left no, Symonds went first. Now with new people coming here, there will be a different crowd for the G-J family. He told me once that he hoped we'd be here until he shuffled off this mortal coil, but that may be years yet."

Laura looked doubtful about that. "He does far too much work, poor dear. It is work that he is totally unaccustomed to doing, and that always makes it much harder."

"They are a remarkable couple. Neither of them knew the meaning of hard work before, but then, look at yourself, my dear."

"Why! What have I done?" asked Laura with concern.

"Plenty," William replied with a gay laugh. "You were always a spoilt young lady, both at home and abroad. Now you are the mother of a big family. Then think of the work you have done since our marriage. I doubt if any woman has ever worked harder---babies---home---nursing sick Maoris sometimes, and then teaching in school. It is a wonderful record for one so sheltered from hardship when young."

Laura laughed merrily, and William burst out laughing at her merriment. When they subsided, William said as soon as he could speak, "I meant every word that I said, even if you did make me laugh. By the way, where are the children?"

"They are playing with their dolls in the rushes. Your news last night made them think that there is little time for their games, and Louisa took her book under a tree near them."

"That's an excellent idea. They'll be surprised when they find how soon they can become accustomed to new surroundings. The memory of this place will fade soon in their young minds," said William. "Youngsters' memories are short."

"No, I am sure they'll always remember the Acacia Hill and the paks---the creek, too. The boys will miss digging in the moats---they always think they will find treasures hidden by the old warriors, but I am sure they were all collected after the wars. The tohungas are sure to have them in the meeting house at Pukerata."

"Well," said William, decidedly, "If they had found any greenstone or other Maori belongings they would have had to part with them. Did they think I'd let them keep them? They would have handed them back to the chief at once."

"I suppose a chief would take precedence over a tohunga---if there are any now," said Laura, rather dubiously. "I remember my Dad saying that the tohungas were the medical priests of the tribes. They attended to the tummies of the sick with their native medication and then attended to their spiritual needs by teaching them all the weird superstitions handed down from early times."

"Some of them must have been good fellows," William observed. "I have been told by old Solomon of the Evil Eye that the inland tribes never touched human flesh. Their tohungas were 'agin' it, against the morals, also, of the coast tribes who loved 'long pig.'"

Laura shuddered. "I've always thought that so horrible. To eat human flesh is so revolting, and then to add insult upon injury by calling it 'long pig'!"

"Well, old Solomon assured me that it was quite tasty when you really got down to it. He said that in the ignorant days when food was scarce he had been compelled to partake of part of a captured slave. There were many paks around Auckland, and as many different tribes. When the weather was too wild for them to fish they used to sally out and capture a slave from a neighbouring fortress or pak. He once slyly told me that they had once caught a white skinned sailor-----"

"No! No!" exclaimed Laura, quite green in the face.

"Oh! Yes," replied William, "but they did not like it, so never tried any more Whites. We eat too much salt, and that revolted them at once."

"It is a good thing something did," cried Laura, retreating into the next room to end the conversation.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

When Charles and George returned in time for lunch they said they had enjoyed themselves immensely. The G-Js were very upset when Charles told them the news. The young people immediately found a map---"not as good as yours, Father"----and pored over it.

Will said he thought some of them could take the new road that was being formed over the Wauku summit, and ride down the ranges to Waimamaku, missing the round-a-bout way on the waterway.

Across country it should be somewhere in the vicinity of thirty miles.

William listened quietly, "Did you remember to tell Mr G-J that I would be down later to help him?"

Charles looked uncertainly at his father. "No, I suppose I should have gone round to the Peak paddock and told him, he was working over there. I thought we would be too long away, so left a message. Was that all right?"

"Oh, I suppose so," replied his father, "so long as they deliver the message. I shall get away directly after lunch."

Charles nodded. "That is what I said you were sure to do. Mrs G-T said she would tell her husband."

That is good. There's one thing. I'm not certain you should say Mrs G-J although we do. It does not sound quite respectful. I do not wish to stop you otherwise."

"I don't think it matters, Father. I noticed Mrs G-J say to Janet that she was to tell her father that Mr T would be down early. Janet was taking a billy of tea across to him."

William threw back his head and laughed heartily. "I knew that your mother calls me Mr T sometimes, but I did not know that others had the habit!"

The children round the table joined in the merriment, and that amused their parents so much that they felt pleased that such little harmless remarks could brighten a luncheon table. Charles was very quiet. He noticed that his father was "putting on an act", and guessed that he was really quite sorry to leave his beautiful garden and the picturesque valley. He remembered that when his Grandfather Tobin passed away in Exmouth some years before that his heart had been full of pity for his father, so far from Home and all he had held dear there.

The mail on Tuesday night had been so late in coming through that he and his father did not wait for it.

Charles called at the G-J's the next afternoon to get the mail when school was over. He had returned late home and found them at the dinner table.

When his father had opened the English mail letter containing the news of the old Army officer's passing, his face had whitened under the tan. He recalled, too, how his father had toyed with his food and then hurriedly escaped from the room.

That evening when they all went on with their homework he was still pacing the path outside the front windows. It was a dark night and Laura had gone out to walk with him before putting the little ones to bed. Charles could recall his own feelings of anguish for his father's sorrow, as he listened to the footsteps slowly pacing up and down before the windows that quiet night.

William had been more reserved for some days and even weeks, in his dealings with outsiders, but in the house had been more restrained and gentle to the children, although he joined in with the family jokes and table talks.

Later, he had spoken of his father's death one day when they were taking a long walk together. He had related many interesting episodes of his life to the regiment in India, and spoke of his death as "the passing of the old order."

"I wish you, Charles, always to impress upon the younger children that it is a very gracious and honourable charge upon one who is the descendant of a long and noble line. Through the course of years and the lack of commercial instincts or training there has been a great drain on capital assets. The line has grown less and less prosperous through the last couple of centuries. A tradition passed down through the ages is that principle must never be sacrificed for monetary gains. The remembrance that one is but the leaf of a tree that grew gloriously through the past, should keep one's backbone erect and one's head high. Nothing can wither one's soul but the sacrifice of honour and integrity. It is the soul of the family that counts at the Last Call."

Charles could not sleep. He had been so excited over the projected move that sleep seemed to have flown out of the open window. Lying there and thinking of his father's words which he thought he remembered faithfully, Charles thought that his father and mother were well suited. She was a proud woman, quick to resent undue curiosity shown by acquaintances, but withal so gentle. Gentle and unassuming, she tended kindly to the sick and old Maori people when she visited them with William in their whares.

He recalled how lovingly she had nursed a typhoid child through its illness, scarcely leaving its side. When the little girl had been able to rise for a little each day Laura had left her in the care of some relatives while she rushed home to bath and change. One day, leaving full directions behind, Laura rushed home for a short time. When she returned to the girl's home, she discovered that the child had taken some food from the pantry, and was suffering a collapse. The doctor, who lived some thirty miles away was fortunately in the district at a patient's home, but he could do nothing. Charles remembered his mother's grief at the girl's passing, although the doctor told her she did more than any other white woman would have done, and he praised her careful and loving nursing.

She cared neither for riches nor poverty, but only that her children should lead honourable lives; always being kind and gentle to those less fortunate than themselves; and keeping, Charles thought lovingly, a delicate reticence past which no one could intrude. Lapped by pleasing memories of parents and home the deep-souled boy turned on his pillow and drifted into dreamland.

One Sunday afternoon, just before Christmas, the younger ones had been to Sunday school and the church service. They came rushing in to where Laura was sitting talking to Charles. He had injured his foot and was resting it.

"Why hurry so? Where are the big girls?" enquired Laura.

"They are coming, Mother. Do you know what happened, Mum? Louisa

and the two Gordon-Jones' girls were just behind and other children following them. When we stopped to speak to some Maori children the white kids shouted at us----"

"Yes," cried Freddie, interrupting excitedly, "They said 'oo-oh - you talked to Maoris on the road' and they jeered at us."

Lsura asked quietly, "What did you do?"

"We went on speaking to them for a minute and then came on. The poor Maoris looked so snubbed because it was so rude. It was Mrs Tom Te Whata and the wee children."

Laura rose, her face flushed with indignation. "Those dear wee mites! You were quite right not to take any notice of those uncouth children. It is only ignorance that makes them act so, poor creatures, they are only being dragged up. I'm very glad we have very few settlers who allow their children to act so boorishly. Never take any notice of rude sniggers or sly whispers if what you are doing is right."

"But, Mum," said Freddie, "They will tell the other children and we'll get laughed at next Sunday by some of them. They never speak to Maoris on the road, they'd be ashamed."

Laura looked sadly at her little daughter. "Ashamed!" she said scornfully. "They should be more ashamed of having such common and ignorant minds. If you go by your conscience and your good manners you need never mind what people like those say. I would rather you are kind to our Maoris than be like some of the children you spoke about. They know nothing---their people never were anything---and they do not wish to be anything worth-while."

"But the Springalls and the Folders have big farms," said George wonderingly.

Laura looked at the young people and said gently, "You are not too young to know that we don't consider people for the money they have, or the big houses they own. Unless they have gentle and kindly manners, trying to do all the good they can as they go through life, then I'm afraid I wouldn't consider them to be worth knowing. Not if they were rolling in riches. No, my dears, you will find as you go through life that there are as many rich common people as there are common and poor people. Commonality is not confined to the really poor who have never had a chance and know no better. You will find just as much commonality or vulgarity among wealthy people, living in luxurious homes and spending money like water."

The children wanting to know how they were to judge people to be worth knowing, or to consider them just the vulgar kind, Laura replied, "People worth knowing may be as poor as church mice, but you will know them by their integrity; their manner of living and their speech. Oh! A number of things - or they may be well-off but high-principled and worthwhile people. Some rich people you know at once by their questionable way of living---they often do shoddy and doubtful things. Your father and I consider people like that to be vulgar and common-minded, and not worth worrying about."

Charles had been sitting quietly by, listening to the conversation but not joining in. He said quietly, "Hear! Hear! Mother, I think you have hit it off to a T".

Laura glanced smilingly at him and said to the others, "Is there anything else you wish to know just now?"

"No, thankyou, Mother," answered Freddie, politely. Then hastily said, "May we have a game, now?"

"You may, if you change into your play clothes. I hope you will think over what I have just told you."

"We shall," said George turning from following the other two. "It was like a school lesson, Mums, but better, because we want to know about these things."

"Always the courteous gentleman, our George," said Charles affectionately, as George disappeared round the corner.

He went out after chatting for a few minutes. He got the morning wood, and then let the old dog, Ben, off his chain for a run. He thought over his Mother's words, and of the people they knew throughout the

settlements. He believed he would be able to divide the sheep from the goats now that his mother had given them a few pointers.

His foot was painful so he sat on the wood-block thinking over the events of the past week, while Ben tore off for his afternoon run.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Christmas was celebrated very quietly that year at the Otawa school house. The children hung up their stockings as usual, and saw that their parents and Charles and Louisa did the same. The latter was beginning to feel that she did not wish to look "babyish" by believing in Santa Claus.

As soon as it was daybreak whistles blew, toys were played with and books were strewn over the beds.

The Christmas Day service was always now held on the preceding Sunday and William read a Christmas gospel at the usual pre-breakfast prayers. Directly after the meal, both William and Laura went on with their packing. Dinner was a very noisy occasion as the young ones were allowed to take charge for once, and each one hoped to get the silver coin or other trifle stirred into the Christmas pudding.

In the afternoon, William suggested that they should all go for a walk to the far pah overlooking the Pukerata settlement. They spent a very happy time on the hills and got back to greet Mr and Mrs G-J who were their regular Christmas evening visitors.

After, the days seemed to rush by on winged moments. Between packing boxes of books and cases of household linen, and other things they could do without for a few weeks, Laura had to pause to greet people who rode for miles to say farewell.

She was surprised at the innate kindness and generosity of people who were struggling to make a living on heavily bushed sections and very little money coming in, though, looking ahead, she knew they would be on a very good footing presently. She hid her embarrassment when they brought farewell gifts to speed them on their way.

Then William had his hour of embarrassment when, after the church service that he was taking, a spokesman for the congregation asked him to remain behind for a short time.

After speeches of gratitude from some of the leading settlers, William faced the crowded room of faces that he had seen before him for so long, and a wave of sadness swept over him at the thought that another man would soon be taking his place. The kindly settlers, never thinking of the gifts that their wives and children had showered upon Laura and the family, had made a collection, travelling miles for it, and invested the money in a very handsome marble clock. A chiming clock which was the delight of the family for years.

In fact, it was still on the mantelpiece of a descendant's home in Auckland a few years ago. And may be still, for all I know to the contrary, and that in 1955. Representing an act of kindness and gratitude for services willingly given, lasting on through the years, adding a touch of beauty when it chimes the hour, it is in itself a sermon that is exhilarating to ponder over in a quiet hour.

William thanked the congregation for their kind thought, and spoke of the happy years he had enjoyed in that district. He would miss the afternoon service very much, and was glad to pay a tribute to the kind hearts and generosity of the people who had encouraged him by their constant attendance.

As the gathering broke up, people crowded round him, shaking his hand and wishing him a happy future.

As he left, and passed through the grounds, people who had come too late for the service waylaid him along the path. The clock was to be packed and sent to him at his new address, so William had an additional cause to be grateful.

Laura and William never forgot the kindness of the many settlers and in after days the memory of that beautiful bush clad countryside,

with the graceful tree ferns and delicate ferns and masses abounding everywhere, was ever with them.

On their way to the waiting launch at the Taheke wharf, people gathered in knots at the road junctions and outside their scattered farm-houses to call god-speed as the family passed by.

One old lady amused the two girls, Louisa and Freddie, by kissing them all goodbye. She said, with tears in her eyes, "The best of friends must part. It is always the sadness of life."

Always in her special seat in the schoolroom for the service, so she had been the first out of the building. As the congregation streamed out, the old lady was driving away in her high gig. So William and Laura had never met her, and the girls did not even know her by sight.

When they both giggled, as youngsters often will, as they passed on, William said severely, "That is enough, girls. She seems to be a sweet old lady and a solitary one except for her son and his wife. I think she looks upon us as friends because we all worshipped together in that little schoolroom. I am really sorry we never had a chance of meeting her, but she lives so far off the beaten track that our paths would never cross."

"But, Father, she could have waited behind and asked someone to introduce her," said Louise.

"That is quite true, my dear," he replied gently. "I think if we had met her we would have found her to be a very sweet and interesting woman. She has an excellent manner, so must have led a very different life at one time."

"Didn't you ever meet her when you went out calling with Mr Walsh, William?" asked Laura.

"No, my dear. She was either inside and too shy to entertain strangers, or else she was away from home each time. The place appeared to be empty."

The trip down the river in the launch from Taheke was one never to be forgotten. A tidal river, the water was level with the banks. Weeping willow trees had been planted for miles along the banks, and thick limbed over-hanging branches swept the water gracefully.

"Those willows," observed the man at the wheel to William, "are said to be from Napoleon's grave at St Helena. They are a great age and supposed to have been started by cuttings brought over and planted by an old French sailor."

"That is most interesting," replied William admiring the broad river, as it swept past farmlands and native villages. "I have heard that said in other parts of New Zealand, but the work could hardly have been done by one man. One would not think so."

"You'd be surprised at some of the places those trading boats visited," said the young man. "My grandfather was on a trading vessel in the early days and his diary makes very good reading. I think the same sailor could have kept some cuttings and planted them everywhere the boat called in search of trade. It is surprising how long the life essence in willow cuttings remains."

William cogitated over that, and then agreed that it was quite possible. He observed that an interesting diary of early events would be welcomed in the museum in Auckland.

The two men discussed many subjects and William remarked later that the young man had evidently enjoyed a fine education. But they did not deal in personalities so William never knew where the young man came from in the first place.

As they passed Maori villages the young people were startled to see women doing their washing in those deep waters. A plank was pushed out over the water's edge and firmly fastened into the side of the bank with battens. Women, their skirts tied up out of the way, stood on the planks so suspended, their bare feet in the water.

There they washed clothes, that had evidently first been soaped thoroughly, by beating them with a flat and narrow board. Clothes were spread out to dry on the grass beyond the banks, and very white and clean they appeared to be.

The sight of a number of women beating and rinsing their clothes while the tide-waters lapped around them was a very entertaining one and the children were sorry to leave the villages behind.

As they passed one rather larger village, old women were sitting on the banks, while children crawled round them. The children were astonished to see one old woman pick up a crawling baby and throw it into the river. Young girls and women were swimming in the water but left the bairn alone. Just as the launch was passing they saw its little head bobbing above the water and a woman was bending over to lift it out.

The helmsman laughed at their exclamations and said that was nothing. They taught all the youngsters to swim, it seemed sometimes before they could walk, and the child invariably struggled to keep afloat. The women, he said, were very efficient and he had never heard of a child drowning. They did not swim as Europeans did, they seemed to use a sort of dog paddle, but got along.

The day was so sunny and the air so bracing and soft, that the same thing was going on at all the lower riverside villages, so the family were entertained by the new sights and sounds on the way, and the Maoris waved and smiled as the launch hurried by.

They did not touch at any of the wayside settlements. The launch went steadily on while the river broadened on either side, and they got their first sight of mangroves. On each side of the passageway for boats and shipping craft these strange and distorted trees grew in profusion, and rising out of the water for such a distance on either hand, the sight was a novel and rather eerie one.

Laura shuddered as she thought to herself that she would not like to wake up in a lonely boat marooned on those sad waters. She always had fanciful thoughts about places and people and had sometimes tried to put them on paper, but after she had written her usual weekly letters and replied to a few business ones, she found her time for writing had flown. Life was busy when one taught the lower classes and sewing in the school. That in itself was enough for many women but with the home and flower garden to look after when the evening came she felt that she had done a real day's work.

William and Charles talked with the men on the launch. The children chatted merrily while watching the changing scenes as the launch skimmed over the water on its way to Opononi.

Laura sat with the youngest on her lap, watching the water and dreamily feeling that it was very pleasant to sit still and rest.

Presently one man went into the cabin and soon came out with a large tray, carrying cups and saucers and a huge teapot of steaming tea. He placed it beside Laura and returned with a brimming jug of milk and a tin of biscuits.

Laura talked to him while he waited to see if she thought the tea was strong enough, then he joined the man at the wheel and William and Charles joined the others.

They had lunched early at a friend's place in Taheke before boarding the launch and the breeze on the water had made their appetites keen. They enjoyed the refreshing tea and the children thought it was fun to have a little meal on board. They still had an hour's run before they reached Opononi, so they appreciated the kind thought of the sailor.

William and Charles loitered over their tea until they noticed that the two men had finished theirs so Charles took the tray to the cabin and joined the men by the wheel.

One man pointed out Fakanæ Gorge as the launch rushed by and it seemed very soon after that Opononi could be seen far down on the south side of the harbour. Shining white beaches, combined with the glare of the sun on the blue water made a dazzling light to which their eyes were unaccustomed and the girls exclaimed at the beauty of the harbour and the white sandhills.

"Mother," asked George, "Why does this bright light dazzle my eyes when we had the same sun in Otaua, and the days just as hot?"

Laura told him to pull his straw hat well over his eyes, and then added, "I suppose it is because we have always been used to the green countryside. Don't you remember the way the glare on the clay roads on the Kaikohe hills affected our eyes? Sometimes, too, at the creek above the bend where the bank was nothing but fine, white, hard pipe-clay?"

"Of course," replied George, "I had forgotten that. But this is a beautiful sight, isn't it, Mums?"

Children were playing on the sand at one place and the little ones on the launch longed to play there also.

Just past the group of children a long procession was noticed wending its way along the sands.

"That looks like a funeral procession," said the sailor.

The man at the wheel nodded gravely, "It is Miss Drewitt's funeral, I remember seeing the notice in the paper. A tragic thing."

Then he told them that a riding party had been on its way to, or from church. He could not recall which. They were all riding fast along the sand when a riderless horse came dashing past the young people in front. To everyone's horror a girl was being dragged along the hard sand, her foot was still in the stirrup as the horse galloped past. The event had shocked the whole coast, as the girl was a general favourite. He ended with, "I think we are about the only men from these parts who are not following the funeral. I had this date fixed up with the launch, but nearly every family will be represented at the funeral."

The procession, long as it was, faded into the distance, but the thought of the girl's tragic death cast a gloom over the happiness of all on board. Hardly a word was spoken until the launch approached the outskirts of Opononi. They passed many launches and sailing boats lying off-shore, while several schooners and brigs were anchored in the harbour.

The white sails everywhere, with the deep blue water of the Hokianga harbour, made an attractive picture.

The men on the boat pointed out interesting places along the beach, and told them that several other boats were expected during the week.

"Brigantines and schooners, mostly," one added, "but they add an attraction to the port. This place is very busy when a number of sailing vessels arrive together. That brigantine over there is just in from Sydney," pointing to a beautiful boat lying at anchor not far from the wharf which their own launch was approaching.

The family made quite a large group when they gathered on the wharf with their personal luggage piled nearby. William had told them before they left Otaua that they may have to stay at the Wharf Hotel until they made arrangements for their furniture to be transported over the hills to the inland valley.

As it happened, they stayed over a week at the hotel. The children enjoyed the life from the moment they rose in the morning until they went to bed at night. They wandered the beaches for some miles each way, and spent a great deal of time just playing on the shore or watching the loading and unloading of the boats lying at the wharf. As soon as one boat left the wharf another slipped into its anchorage and the same sort of work began over again.

Laura was quite happy sitting on the balcony a great part of the day, with the two small children playing around her. They found that one end of the wide balcony was fitted up as a children's playroom, and it seemed to be full of interesting toys of all description.

Nell and 'B' as the babe was called, found it quite a child's paradise. William took Laura for a short walk each morning but she preferred to rest most of the afternoon. The year had been a strenuous one and then with the packing at the last she had felt completely worn out. The bigger girls took the smaller children off her hands for part of the day, so in a few short days Laura felt her own old self. Charles and George followed their father's example in showing her many little attentions, so the time passed very happily for her.

William had no sooner arrived at the hotel than he was called upon by some of the leading men about, who had, through the years, received

hospitality from him when they were in the Otaua district on business of one kind and another.

Some of them had beautiful homes in and around Omapere, so when members of those families called upon both William and Laura they extended many courtesies to them and invited them to their homes to meet their families.

As Laura explained how her hands were tied with her little ones, they invited Charles to take her place. So William and his son had a gay time for the rest of their stay at Opononi.

Laura did not miss the festivities, as there were several other women visitors from other parts staying also at the hotel and being thrown together a great deal, they became very friendly.

One lady was the young wife of the captain of a large overseas liner. She made a great fuss of the girls and sat on the sands often with them, finding the young ones useful in carrying her cushions and waiting upon her. She told Laura that she was recovering from a very severe operation and was to travel quietly round New Zealand until her husband's boat returned from Southampton.

Laura saw a great deal of her as she sat with her and the other visitors until the girls called for her and helped her down to the beach. She was very charming and the Tobin family became quite fond of her. Her passage was booked on a steamer to Auckland and they all helped to carry her luggage on board when the boat sailed a day before William's goods were to be carted over the hills to their new home.

They were all sad when the boat sailed and they could see their new friends waving kerchief no longer, as the steamer puffed its way to the Heads.

I have long forgotten her name, but have never forgotten her gay and laughing personality, nor how the thought of her brave and uncomplaining attitude to life while suffering so sadly, remained with the members of our family for years.

Laura used to say that she was one of the ships that passes by night, but never forgets.

The afternoon before they left, one of the hotel staff came down the sandy steps to the beach where the girls were sitting while the little ones played beside them. "Please, Miss," said the boy to Louisa, "Your Mum says will you all come in as she has a visitor."

The young girl thanked him for delivering the message, and collecting the little ones she and Freddie marshalled them into the hotel diningroom where they knew that people asking for them were shown.

Laura was very happy and animated. She and George were talking to someone whom they knew they had met before. Before they were noticed, Louisa whispered, "I know her, Freddie, Ada Marriner. She always wore a riding habit."

In passing, I may mention that many women rode then in their ordinary skirts and blouses and the few seen wearing the conventional garb were always noticed and remembered. However, Laura had noticed that people she saw in and around the hotel and those who came in from the coast, all dressed more conventionally than many in the new inland settlements.

Miss Marriner kissed the girls warmly and fussed over the little ones, exclaiming at the dark eyes and colouring of Constance, the beauty of Nell's auburn curls and the deep-blue of weeBlanche's eyes.

"Why do you call her Bee or 'B'?" she enquired after the greetings were over. They all laughed. Louisa looked at her mother and then explained, "We called her 'Baby' all the time she was tiny, and then could not break the habit, so then we called her 'B' and it has stuck."

Miss Marriner was smiling at the little one, and said, "And now you cannot break the habit of calling her 'B', I suppose."

She stayed with them for some time. She had met William and Charles when on her way to Omapere, and as they told her the family were at the hotel she had called in to see them all. They were all interested to hear about her home up the river and that her parents were well, although very frail.

When she finally left she said she was glad to have seen them all

and except for luckily meeting Mr T and Charles on the beach, she would have gone past the hotel and probably not have heard they were there until too late.

Laura was inwardly tickled by the unconscious slip as the girl was generally most scrupulous when speaking of others. They all trooped out to the stable and saw her off, feeling that their last day at Opononi had been nicely rounded off by meeting her.

Watching her canter away over the sands towards her home they saw her turn and wave before she gathered speed and was soon lost to sight.

They never saw her again, although some years later it was rumoured that she had married an old admirer who had waited for many years for her as she would not marry while she had her aged parents with her. When they died, she had waited for some time arranging and settling their affairs and disposing of their old home before she had rewarded her faithful friend and left for his home in a distant district.

When William told Laura the report she had looked sadly into the distance, "That is another friendship, William, to which we must write 'finis' and put away with other old memories."

CHAPTER TWENTYONE

The dray left early next morning piled high with household furniture and cases, followed by a smaller vehicle with the rest of the luggage and baggage from the wharf shed. William and Charles sat beside the driver of the second vehicle and both looked forward to seeing the view of the harbour as they climbed the hill behind Omapere. The road wound up the brow of the hill through low bushes and scattered trees which afforded a pleasant shade to wayfarers.

Houses lined the shore at scattered distances from each other as one passed from Opononi to Omapere. Sandhills rose behind them, shining white and dazzling, with a range of low uplands immediately behind the seaside resorts.

On the opposite shore across the blue waters of the harbour were higher white sandhills with sombrely clad hills in the distance. With the blue sky lightly flecked with a few fleecy clouds high above the blue waters the scene was one of indescribable beauty, William thought. He believed he had never seen a more beautiful view, although he had travelled in other countries as a younger man.

Once over the top of the hill the descent at first was steep and roughly graded, although it improved lower down. The way was hilly but not heavily bushed as they had expected it to be, the further they drew away from the Harbour. A few clumps of native bush dotted the hills here and there on the lower hills and a great deal of scrub covered most of the gullies and dips in the hillsides.

Presently they reached a roadjunction and, by passing the one leading to the inland settlements, they followed a road running at the foot of small hills towards the Waimamaku valley, and which continued on down to the coast. The driver told them that the road leading inland, first led to the Waitemarama valley, which was tucked away among hills, and about three miles across the valley from the school to which they were going. The road branched off before reaching the local store and continued further up to the head of the valley. There the Canterbury settlement ran far up-country. Many of the settlers had come from the South Island, and the name Canterbury had been given to the wide sprawling settlement. The Waimamaku valley ran up from the sea, where the river of that name emptied into the ocean, and twisted across the flats for some considerable distance up country. Maori villages occupied much of the high ground on the river banks, and many Maori homes were also dotted over the flats through which the winding river ran. The driver added that the school buildings were prettily situated on a small foothill below the Kaiatewhetu mount which overlooked the Pacific ocean. He gave these interesting items as they

jogged over the hills, in reply to questions from William and Charles. The air was delightfully fresh and they found the drive pleasant.

In reply to a question the driver said "Yes, they are a very fine type of Maori, and more advanced than the inland tribes which I have worked amongst. They have a pretty little church which lies on the side of the school hill and a vicarage among the trees beside it. A Maori clergyman lives there with his wife and family. They have a fine choir, too."

Presently they came to a graded grassy slope which the man said took them to the side gate of the schoolhouse garden. Wheel marks were showing clearly up the slope.

The dray was drawn up outside the gate and two men were engaged in unloading the furniture and carrying it inside the house.

William showed the men where to place the heavier pieces and he and Charles arranged them as the men laid the linoleums and put the beds together. With so much help the two vehicles were unloaded without a great deal of trouble. William paid the men and tipped them for their extra work and he and Charles watched them drive cheerfully down the slope. They turned into the garden again and went round to see how it had been cared for.

The front garden was mainly set out with little flower-beds here and there in a wide grass lawn. The most delightful sight there was a huge acacia tree, which William said was the golden acacia, a glory when in full bloom.

At the sides of the house were fruit trees and some variegated bamboo clumps, with grass paths between them and a group of shady trees, many flowering, grew in a delightful grove next to the fence dividing the school grounds from the house garden.

There was no attempt at a vegetable garden at the back which covered about half an acre. A few nondescript trees were dotted here and there but most of the land was in short grass.

"After leaving your beautiful garden in Otaua, Father, I should think this about breaks your heart!" observed Charles as they returned to the house with some wood which they had collected.

"It is pretty desolate," replied his father. "I shall have to get to work immediately or we won't have a garden in before Autumn. The one advantage over the other gardens we took over is that this is at least clean. The soil looks quite decent, too."

Soon a bright fire blazed merrily in the stove and the kettle began to sing. They opened some cases until they found things for the pantry and glass cupboard and began to set the table as a welcome to Laura and the rest of the family.

William expressed the hope that they would come soon, as he was feeling quite peckish. They were bringing groceries with them to tide them over until they found their way to the local store.

William had his wish almost immediately. Footsteps were heard outside and the voices of children. Hurrying out, William and Charles were in time to help the man unload the boxes and parcels he had got in the waggonette in which he had driven Laura and the others.

Laura came hurrying out of the house and said to the driver, "Don't go until you have had a cup of tea. I noticed the kettle is boiling already."

"Yes" chimed in William, "I had to let the other men go without anything, but you have time to stay."

The man said he was grateful but thought he had better hurry back, "My missus will have my dinner hotted up," he said, "I have a long way to go past Opononi."

Cheerfully accepting a tip with his cheque for driving them all out, he too, drove away as though he had done a good day's work.

"Cheerful sort of fellow, isn't he", said William, shutting the gate.

Laura and the children were delighted with the site of the new little home. The style of house was the same as they had found everywhere they

went. Houses for the teachers were apparently built in the same pattern, never varying. The little linen cupboards had hardly enough room for three people but had to satisfy the needs of a family. It was exactly the same everywhere they went.

Laura had, at first, longed for a house that had been built with an eye for comfort, with a little beauty thrown in, but she had long since become accustomed to the cramping pattern; and did her best to beautify the home with coloured cushions or a change in curtains. She looked upon the Government architects as men who went about their daily work, while leaving their souls in the writing table drawer at home, only to be taken out and aired when work was over. If anyone had referred to an architect as a knowledgeable man, she would have been surprised and wondered if that person had an axe to grind.

Therefore she met with no sweet surprises, or gentle shocks when she went through the rooms, followed by the little ones who trailed after her everywhere just now. They felt they had lost their home and had not yet found another.

"Mumsy", said Louisa, "this house is exactly the same as the Otawa house, only the wallpapers are different. Why don't they make different houses sometimes? I thought we'd find french windows, or something pretty somewhere."

Laura laughed as she looked round the ceiling of the room in which they were standing.

"I have often thought it would be pleasant to find something different, but we must be glad to have a roof over our heads, you know, many people would think this a palace, in other lands. They do give us high ceilings, though."

Charles and his father came in then. They had been looking round the school premises.

"We found something that you will appreciate, Laura," said her husband, smiling. "There is a large American organ in the school. You'd better unpack some of that music you have, and we'll adjourn there when we have had something to eat."

Laura looked at him in astonishment. "My dear, I haven't touched a musical instrument for years, except in one of the hotels we stayed at. My fingers will be far too stiff now."

"Oh! Mother," pleaded Charles as he noticed his father's crestfallen expression. "It is such a lovely-toned organ, with ever so many stops. I'm sure you'll need only a little practice before you will play it beautifully."

"That is sweet of you, Charles," laughed Laura, "but I never tried any kind of organ, though I spent years at the piano. We all had to learn as girls, for a drawing-room accomplishment."

While she talked, she was busily unpacking some boxes marked "kitchen" and "pantry" and passing the contents to the two girls who put them away in the same places they had occupied in their old home in Otawa. George was finishing the tea-table with Constance trying to help. With a bright fire burning in the stove the room was becoming more home-like.

George stood still and watched his mother. He said softly to her, "Mum, you have played a musical instrument often. You play Dad's concertina."

With a slight blush, she said, "I quite forgot the concertina, George, but I don't even play that properly."

"Oh, yes, you do," he persisted, "You play lots of songs. Couldn't you play it again tonight? We'd love to hear it again."

"I wish I could, dear, to please you, but we are far too busy getting your rooms ready for you."

She had no time to cook anything hot for them that afternoon for dinner, but they had another scratch meal. They were all very hungry and enjoyed it as much as though they were having a very well cooked dinner. Hunger is really a wonderful sauce.

It was late when everything had been washed and put away, so they did no more unpacking that night. Laura reminded William that they had been told to expect callers as soon as it was known that the house was occupied. It had been said that the Coast people did not stand upon ceremony but rushed to give the right hand of friendship and welcome to a newcomer.

Everyone worked with a will the next day and late that afternoon everything was in its place and they felt they had really come home.

"All hands and the cook will get a good dinner ready," exclaimed William, after they had been through the rooms and admired the neat and comfortable appearance of each one.

"Come on, girls. Your mother is going to enjoy a good rest while we do some work for a change."

To the children's surprise William served a very excellent dinner.

"Did you think I could not cook a dinner, Charles?" he asked with a twinkle. "I served a good apprenticeship in the logging camp. Each man had to take his turn to help the cook and I used to think he was a patient instructor while I learnt my paces. We used to turn out some excellent meals. The only thing I did not enjoy was when it came to my turn to wash up the dishes and cooking pots!"

CHAPTER TWENTYTWO

The sun rose over the hills next morning in a clear sky. Everybody was up bright and early and the family promised themselves a great deal of fun while finding out the lay of the land.

Behind the house the land sloped gently to the foot of a high hill which promised some good climbing as in several places the hill appeared to have many precipitous cliffs and steep slopes.

On the side that rose from the foot of the valley facing the narrow flat running to the sea, with the river flowing dark and deep between its banks, trees clothed the slopes and grew in thick groves to the ridge of the summit.

William and the boys spent an hour in cutting and gathering wattle wood from a clump of wattle on the slope below the front garden gate. Then they told Laura that they intended to find a track up to the top of the hill behind the house. Laura told them that their driver had told them it was called Mount Kaiatewhetu which meant "food for the stars." and that it was a baby mount. The three went off, across the back garden and through the fence. Pushing their way through manuka scrub clothing the low foothills they came upon a cow-track leading on up through some bush towards the summit. The path turned and twisted, now overlooking the school buildings, and then with another upward curve of the track they found themselves clinging to the hillside and looking down upon the river far below. A road ran alongside the river, so they spoke of following it to the beach that afternoon. It was the continuation of the road that they had followed from Omapere.

From the high cliffs above they could see that no Maoris lived on the narrow flat below. Clumps of rough bushes grew here and there and a stiff grass that grows on the hillside on some of the northern sea-coasts grew sparsely. Bracken fern-covered hills rose from the floor of the narrow valley and seemed to be a continuation of a range following the coastal side of the Waimamaku Valley and running far inland.

William and the two eager lads followed the path, ill-defined in many places as it was, right up to the summit.

Hurrying through some trees which covered that part of the summit the three reached a smooth and rounded knob from where they could see the flat below the school buildings and a wide sweep of the central valley that ran for miles up towards the distant Wauku mountains.

They turned to see the Pacific ocean which lay far beyond them, stretching to the distant horizon. Foothills covered with a rough kind of salt-bush lay between them and the deep blue waters.

"I am disappointed," George burst out with, "I thought we would see the surf beating the cliffs below us. We cannot see the beach."

William said soothingly, "I had the same thought myself, but we shall be able to cross these foothills one day. We should find it grand exercise if rather rough walking."

"Do you notice how the hills run, Father?" asked Charles, looking out towards the ocean below. "If you follow the ridge of the first foothill you'll find a gap where you see the ridge of a lower line of hills. And

again a third range! I wonder how far they run down the coast!"

"It would be interesting to find out, but rather a long walk. I imagine that they line the coast up to the Heads. I'm afraid we'll learn nothing from local people as the driver said no one seems fond of walking round here. They drive or ride if they wish to go any distance."

Charles smiled at his father. "I heard one boy explain at the school ground to his companions that we were all mad on walking because our father is an Englishman. One made a point of contradicting that by saying that his father is English, too but he never walks a yard if he can help it. "Charles paused, then continued, "the first boy said, of course he won't walk, because everyone knows he was a working Englishman."

William was amused. "How did that make sense? Was that all?"

"No, Father," replied Charles rather apologetically, "He said you came from people who never did a day's work in their lives. His mother said she knew it because you were a great walker. Working people never had time to learn to walk, she told him."

William thought that over as they turned towards the track that they had climbed up by.

"She seemed to have something there. It stands to reason that if a man has to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, as the saying is, he will not have time to walk much. Also, in his day off he would be tired after his manual toil and wish to loaf round, I can understand that."

"But your people were always in the Army or Navy or else the Church, so you can't say they knew nothing about work."

William laughed heartily. "It is a very different thing entering the Navy as a midshipman, to working below decks. Also in the Army, the heavier work does not fall to the officer to do, but to the man recruited for these jobs. I recall now that when I did very heavy toil in the bush that bush contract I have often spoken about, that I was very glad to get between the blankets at night. So I suppose that woman really know what she was talking about."

They were going downhill faster than they had climbed up. The track was rough, with great roots of trees sprawling across it in many places so they had to watch their feet as they went. Had they tripped they could have gone heads over heels into the shrubs below but it was on such a steep slope that they did not loiter.

William and Charles slowed down occasionally for George's benefit, but they had to cling to a branch or vine to balance themselves while he was catching up to them. It was really quite a stiff descent on the higher slopes.

Manuka scrub clothed the lower reaches and it was not long before the clearing opened before them and they found the track leading to their side gate. It was pleasant to get home and to find the table set for their mid-day meal. Soon they were all seated round and listening to a summary of the morning's climb.

Louisa said eagerly "Is the bush lovely up there? I suppose you saw heaps of ferns and shrubs. I rather wish I had gone up with you."

William looked at Charles to reply, as he wished the children to talk together, so that he and Laura could pitch their voices on a slightly different key, as parents do when they do not wish to spoil the family's interest in their own conversation. He waited until they were well away, then asked Laura how she had got on. Laura told him how they had filled in the morning hours.

"We even went over to the school for a short time." she went on, "so that I could try some of the old pieces I learnt by heart, but I could not manage at all well. As soon as I grew interested I forgot to pedal. You can imagine how tragic it sounded when we had hoped to have some lovely music."

They both laughed but agreed that the organ was a very fine one. They wondered how the teacher before them had managed to procure one for the school.

"His musical abilities, I suppose," observed William. "It was always common knowledge that he was a fine musician, so I expect he appealed to Wellington, as his knowledge would be handicapped unless he had an instrument."

"I was told this morning that he taught the singing in a masterly manner," said Laura, "so that will help you considerably."

She said that several Maoris had called during the morning. They had wished to welcome the new teachers and Laura said they were well-spoken and understood English very well. Each had brought gifts of potatoes, kumaras or pumpkins and some kumikumi which were a better kind of marrow. The caller yesterday had given Laura some melons.

"You must come out after lunch, and see the very fine kitfuls they brought us."

"It was very kind of them. I had no idea any of them would be along so soon, or I would have remained at home," commented William. When Laura showed him the vegetables, he admired the potatoes but did not know the variety. The boys also passed judgment on them. Their parents encouraged them to learn all they could from their near neighbours, as most of them were skilled farmers. Charles took an interest in the farm crops while George preferred the animals.

Laura had once been speaking to one of their neighbours who said warmly, "That boy, Jarge, of yours, Missus, will make a rare farmer some day. What he doan't know about horses an' pigs is not worth knowing."

And on another occasion, the same farmer had said. "What be you again' to make your big lad do when he grows up, Missus?"

Laura had thought for a while and then replied "We haven't discussed it yet, but examinations never worry him so there should be no trouble to find something for him to do."

"Ah! Yes, Missus, with that headpiece him'll go far. But don't you make him into a ly-er (lawyer) Missus, him'll do for a passon or a Hem-P but doasn't ee make him a ly-er."

The farmer had just been sued for shooting some pigs that had rooted up his potato patch and as his fence was not pig-proof he had lost the case. So he had a very small opinion of lawyers in general!

From the shed Laura and William went on a tour of discovery round the big garden enclosure. The boys ran in to help the girls with the dishes and tidy the room where they had lunched. When it was arranged where the gardening was to be started and other plans for work were made, the couple returned to the house where they found the family talking round the back door.

"Why do you all look so solemn?" asked William. "I should have thought you would have been playing somewhere. Is this a committee meeting?"

The children laughed gaily. "Charles said that you mentioned something about going to the beach later on, but we didn't like to disturb you and Mother."

It was the parents turn to laugh. "Well, we must get our hats and go straightaway. There is no time like the present," said William, briskly. "You must come too, Laura. We are not leaving you at home this afternoon."

"But the little ones," Laura looked apprehensive. "They won't be able to walk all the way and the baby-carriage needs new wheels I am afraid. The Maoris told me it is quite three miles down to the beach."

"No excuses, my dear. The baby carriage will be all right for today," said William. "It will hold two and we can all wheel it in turns. Isn't that so, boys?"

The boys agreed. Then Laura remembered that one Maori had said there were fine mussels on the rocks down there, but on this side of the river.

"Better and better, George, you carry a billy and I'll take a sugar-bag. We must get enough to make it worthwhile."

There was a rush and a bustle for some time until everything was left to Laura's satisfaction. The stove fire had to be put out, and windows shut.

The Maori visitors had that morning warned Laura never to leave her doors unlocked as the road running past to Opononi carried many strangers from far down the coast. They themselves, one had added, had often suffered by having potatoes and other garden produce stolen by some of the passing country. William knew how sternly the Maoris looked upon thieving offences

committed by their own people, so understood that they were expected to take the hint that those roving passers-by were dishonest whites. The Maoris had a way of dealing with an offending Maori by causing the culprit to be sent to Coventry for a settled time. They did it, he knew.

As he pocketed the key after locking the back door he observed that it was the first home they had lived in during their stay in North Auckland that it had been necessary for him to lock the door behind him.

"It certainly gives one food for serious thought when one finds how necessary it is to lock doors and windows when living in a semi-white community."

Years later, just before William's retirement from school teaching he was at a school on the East Coast, south of East Cape. There the doors were never locked. One Sunday, when they had been to the little church down the valley towards the sea, they returned to find everything apparently, as they had left it. When setting the table for tea one of them discovered in the bread-box a note, saying "Sorry I took a half loaf, No chance of buying and a long way to go."

The half loaf had gone but nothing else had been touched. The note was signed "Wayfaring Man" and they felt he was certainly a man who they could respect, as he had seen eggs, bacon, butter, meat and other home necessities staring him in the face but had just taken a small portion to stave off the pangs of hunger.

A purse containing a sum of money had been left on the dressing table, instead of being picked up by William as he dressed for church. It was just as he had left it.

They never dreamt, then, that the days of universal honesty and brotherly trust were rapidly passing away and that the whole country would soon fill up with people sickening of the get-rich-anyway fever, so fatal to decency, honour and brotherly trust.

CHAPTER TWENTYTHREE

It was a very hot afternoon, the sky a deep blue and only ruffled by a few soft white clouds drifting here and there.

William, with the two boys, saw the family down almost to the bridge that crossed the water not far from the mouth of the river. He said then, that if the others would saunter down to the beach and "take things easy" he and the boys would go straight on to get mussels. So the three set off at a good pace, skirting the hills until they reached the beach.

As Laura and the others crossed the bridge, the tide was rapidly running out, and they could see the current rippling the deep waters under the bridge. The little ones loved the wide planking and wished to stay and play on the bridge, but they were put in the baby cart and taken along the road. There was a large spreading pohutukawa tree at the foot of the sandhills near the open beach, so they all sat down to enjoy the shade, the little ones making sand castles and chattering noisily.

While Laura was helping the little ones with their castles and houses, Louisa and Freddie whispered together. As their mother came back and sat by them, Louisa said, "Mumsy, you promised to tell us the rest of the story about Great Grandfather Brown. We never reminded you because you were so busy."

The two girls debated the question as to where she had left off, while Laura was settling herself comfortably, her back against the stout trunk and her feet curled up under her skirt.

"You told us about Great Grandmother Brown dying suddenly and the little boy left all alone," said Louisa, while Freddie added, "I've wanted to know that, I've often thought of the little boy. He was our Grandfather, wasn't he?"

"Yes, he is your Grandfather Brown, and he is as bright and gay as ever. The grandfather of you all, and my father. You must not confuse

relationships. But I think I must have been saying what a lonely little boy he must have been, for he had always had his mother with him, while his father came to see him from time to time. Only two groups of his friends knew of his marriage and they kept his secret faithfully, as he did not wish to have to live the life of a home-loving husband. I'll call him Charles Armitage now, as it will be easier and you know I am not disrespectful.

"My father told me that Charles Armitage had told him what a blow it was for him when his wife died. He had expected to have her in that little home for years looking after his son.

"I don't think he had ever thought of her missing young Charles when he grew old enough to go to a good school. He seems to have been an intensely selfish man, but I think that was because he knew nothing about women as home loving creatures. Most likely, manlike, he thought she would then be glad to lose the responsibility and enjoy her own simple life. And, perhaps her religion would satisfy her. She was a very quiet woman and he probably never knew very much about her own wishes. His craze was for walking while she clung to her little home and possessions. There never seemed to be much real interest between them beyond the fact that she had agreed to his terms, as long as the home was made over to her. Women seemed to do strange things in those days for the sake of independence and security. Nowadays women would snap their fingers at his foolish notion of women. They would prefer a career."

Laura paused for a while and was amused at some of the children's comments. Louisa asked her, "Father wanted you, didn't he, as well as the rest of us?"

"Yes, dear," Laura replied with a merry laugh. "You see, in C.A.'s day women were used to being dictated to, most of their lives. First by their father who mostly ruled the home with a rod of iron."

"Like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's father?", suggested Louisa.

"Yes," replied Laura, "though I believe he was quite tame compared to some men of those days. With a lift of their fingers their womenfolk stopped speaking, or whatever they were doing at the moment. With a lifted eyebrow the women knew they were not wanted in the room. Oh! I heard lots of tales about the old tigers who thought women were their absolute property and had no minds of their own. We had some in Taranaki, and the women were not allowed to be anything else - and their men used to brag about their sweetness and "they were so gentle" but they fluttered if a man addressed them. It was supposed to be the way a woman should be."

The girls both laughed merrily. Laura was so carried away by the remembrance of some well-bred but suppressed women that they had known among their circle of friends, that she had been imitating the flutters and simpers of those poor down-trodden old-time ladies. Realising her lapse from the good manners which she tried to instil in the girls, she blushed and then joined in with their laughter.

"I should not imitate people like that, but my father did not believe in the way women were suppressed in many homes, as I suppose he was determined that none of his daughters should be repressed, and simper like brainless dolls. To go back to C A B, I think his heart broke when his friend Keats died, and he had not been at his side. He could not settle in England, so he went to the Continent where they lived until my father was fourteen years old. When they first went to Italy they stayed in different cities from time to time. My father said that one of his earliest recollections of Italy was of living in a farmhouse away up among the hills of Italy. C A would leave the city they had been living in and go away into the country. There he would find a farmer who would board himself and his small son, and look after the boy when he went walking round the district. Charles, my father, would play with the little Italian children and be mothered by the farmer's wife until his father returned. Sometimes he would stay there for a while, reading and lazing under the trees while his little boy played with his playmates. Then they would up and off to another country district where my grandfather would climb all the hills around and leave Charles with some other family. Or they

would return to some city and his father would enjoy a round of pleasure, and the fine ladies made a great fuss of wee Charles. My father was put in the hands of tutors, and all his studies were conducted in the Italian and French languages. Young Charles was fourteen when his father decided to return to England and he settled then at Plymouth. My father said he had to learn English when he was sent to a boarding school and he suffered a great deal of teasing from the boys there.

"Some day I'll try to remember to tell you more about his life in Italy. He used to take me riding through Taranaki when he was Superintendent and his duties carried him across to Hawera and other places. I think that at that time, I lived more in the saddle than I walked over the ground. They were beautiful rides and I knew many of the roads and tracks from one end of Taranaki to the other. My other sisters, your aunts, were very nervous and would not ride until Jessie married Parson Brown's son and he took her to live on his farm on the ranges. There she had to ride, or she would not have got away anywhere. She had a large family of lovely boys and girls.

"Mother, was Aunt Jessie's father-in-law the clergyman you and Father were speaking about the other day?" asked Freddie.

"Yes, I remember we mentioned him. He rode all over his parochial parish on a grey horse and everyone loved him. They called him Parson Brown. Before he rode away up hill and down dale he filled his pockets with blackberry seeds. Whenever he passed a disused sawpit he dismounted and planted some seeds round it.

"Ah! Aha!" said he, while he was planting them. "The settlers' children in days to come will bless my memory for providing them with such luscious fruit, when they run to and from school in the hot summers." He did not realise that the plants were to prove the curse of Taranaki for many years after. That was what a blackberry bush was called by the farmers--- the curse of Taranaki."

While she had been telling the story Laura and the two girls had been building castles, too, while the little ones grouped themselves in the shade and ate apples, and rested their little limbs.

When Laura stopped speaking the two girls looked lovingly at her.

"I wish I could tell stories like you do," murmured Louisa, and Freddie agreed with her.

"You'll tell better stories when you reach my age, because you will see more as the years pass than we were able to see in those days," returned Laura. "So many more people are coming to New Zealand that towns will grow rapidly. There will be so much more to do and see everywhere, that you will look back upon this part of your life as a sweet and gentle first chapter."

"Couldn't you tell us some more, Mumsy?" asked Louisa, as she sat back on her heels and surveyed the sand-castles.

"Not now, dear, I am getting as hoarse as a crow! As soon as the little ones are rested we'll wander along the beach, and you girls can wade for a while."

"Oh! Goody! Scrummy!" came from the girls, while the small ones jumped up, declaring that they were not tired, not a bit!

The tide was far out, leaving a white and very wide expanse of hard sand that was very pleasant to walk upon.

The girls were amazed to see how far the beach ran at the foot of small hills, and Louisa exclaimed. "Isn't it strange to think that the beach goes like this all round New Zealand? I suppose you could go straight round the two islands by just walking round the foothills as we are doing now. Of course" hastily, "I know we would cross Cook's Strait in a boat, but then we would land on the beach again."

"Not quite, dear, not quite all the way. You would find in many places that the deep ocean laps high cliffs seemingly all day long, and you could only go on by crossing the cliffs above. At other places, there are huge boulders almost the size of a small house, and running for a good distance along the foot of the cliffs. Walking would be so rough that you could never climb over them unless you had all the time in the world. Before you got far along, the tide would be returning as your progress would be so very, very slow. Then you would find that you could not possibly

climb the cliffs because they would be too high and precipitous, probably overhanging in places. The tide would rush in, and where would you be?"

"Kuamutu" chimed in little Constance, who was listening, her big dark grey eyes wide under their smutty lashes.

The girls had been listening to their mother with solemn eyes, but at the little one's sudden and apt ejaculation they all broke into peals of merry laughter. In a moment, one girl after another was flying ahead over the hard sand, while Laura and the youngest were left strolling after them.

After their exciting race and the girls all returned to walk again quietly by their mother's side, Louisa said "How did you know all that--- about the beaches, I mean. Have you seen it like that?"

Laura replied with a happy laugh. "Yes, dear, in different places in New Zealand. You will, too, when you grow up and move around."

Freddie exclaimed, "That's what I mean to do. Find my way all over the country."

You'll never be able to, Freddie. You will never have enough money to travel like that," Louisa retorted.

"I will, I will," exclaimed the little girl excitedly. "I'll get some work and earn money and then move on and see other places. I'd keep on doing that until I had been everywhere."

"Nonsense," replied Louisa, "You'll marry some man and have a pack of children. They all do."

"Children, children," Laura cried, "Don't get excited over some harmless remarks. I expect you will both see a great deal of the country by and bye. As it is, you have seen a great deal more than hundreds of children of the past, as they grew up in one place and married and died without going more than a few miles away from their homes."

Both girls thought that would be very dull, and agreed that they were really very lucky little girls. So peace was restored.

As they had wandered a good way from the river's mouth they turned and retraced their steps slowly.

"If the tide had not been so far out we could all have paddled and had some fun, but we would never get the little ones along. They would be too tired."

"It would have been lovely, Mumsy," cried Louisa. "We may come another day, may we not?"

"Yes, dear, I shall keep the little ones at home with me and you may come down with your father."

"Don't you enjoy it?" asked Freddie.

"Of course I do, dear. The air is so fresh. I always love being by the sea, but I think this walk will last me for a long while."

When they reached the pohutakawa tree Laura thought the tide was turning so allowed the girls to have a paddle after all. They wished to have Constance with them so presently she gave way and took the small ones to the water's edge.

They had a wonderful time. It was marvellous fun, the little ones thought. They all sang and chattered while they played in the shallow water. Laura laughed when they all tore shorewards when a gentle wave rippled towards them.

They won't always be so careful, thought Laura. Once they bath with others who are used to the breakers they will love it intensely and my heart will always be in my mouth when I watch them.

Not long after they turned homewards, knowing that William and the boys would soon catch them up. He had said they had better start quietly back if he did not return within a certain time.

"Take care of yourself, dear, in this heat," he had said to Laura. "Just go back quietly with the children and we'll follow as soon as we fill the bag."

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CHAPTER TWENTYFOUR

The next morning at breakfast William said to his wife, "My dear, I thought I'd take the boys across the flat to the little store at Waiotemarama. At Opononi they assured me that I'd find a thriving store there and we must find where the post office is, and also whether there is a church of any description."

"There's the Maori church just below us, Father," put in George, "I was talking to the Maori Clergyman, and he asked if we would attend the services there."

William looked amused as he said, "I might have known you would soon get to know our neighbours, George. Did you say we should be glad to attend sometimes, but that we would have to find out where our own church is situated?"

"I did," replied George quickly. "I said we'd be glad to go but that we younger ones do not speak Maori very fluently. He told me that ~~ours~~ ^{ours} is held in a small schoolroom at Taiotemarama."

"He knows it all!" said William across the table to Laura. "Just leave it all to George."

The family laughed, but Louisa said quickly, "Everybody talks to George, and they tell him everything."

"I can't help that" answered George, hurriedly, as though it were something to be ashamed about.

Laura smiled sweetly at the blushing lad. "I wish I had your gift George, as people all speak so highly of you. Didn't old Weatherby say that you knew everything? He said you were a walking "ensickerpeedee."

George joined in the laughter that rippled round the table.

"I thought Father was just laughing at me," explained the modest lad. "I enjoy talking to people. They all know such a lot of different things, and all quite different from school lessons."

When the boys had done their usual tasks about the house and filled the wood-boxes needed for the kitchen William told them they had time for a bathe, so they took their towels, following a track that led through manuka scrub to their latest find, which was a stream which was deep enough to bathe in, though only a narrow width from bank to bank.

A few yards above the track there was a pretty little waterfall beneath overhanging trees, the long stream of water falling between ferns which lined the banks of the little stream. Beneath the fall was a deep rounded basin, rather like an old-fashioned bath-tub, which the waters had hollowed out through the years. So now they used the "basin" as a bath with the shower overhead.

When the young people had discovered it in one of their many rambles, they had hailed the stream with a shout of delight. They had farewelled the Maungataua creek with very saddened hearts and though this little stream would never approach that beautiful, tree-lined winding and high-banked creek in their affections, it soon made its own place in the lives of the children who were to live there for some years.

It was not long before William and the two boys went off with light hearts for a walk across the valley to the settlement behind the line of hills that were always a delight to William's eyes. He could never contemplate the idea of living long in a place that had no hills near to enhance the view.

Laura used to laughingly say that he was like her grandfather, Charles Armitage, in his affection for hilly country.

They did not return to the house until nearly one o'clock. Laura had kept their meal hot as she and the rest had not waited. It was a hot afternoon. The little ones were resting under the golden acacia tree with rugs and picture books, while the bigger girls sat with their mother in the cool sittingroom.

"Ah! I did not realise how hungry I was until I sat down," exclaimed William, as he and the boys prepared to do full justice to the lunch.

"What did you think of the walk over there, William?" enquired Laura as she poured out their tea. "Do you get much shade, or is the walk all through the low scrub that lies around here?"

"My dear, we thoroughly enjoyed it. The walk is very pleasant and there is plenty of shade, because as you leave the cleared land the manuka beyond is the larger kind. There is really more shade than sunshine until you near the store."

"The store, Mother, is on the other side of a small creek we had to cross on stepping stones."

"Is it anything like our stream here?" asked Louisa.

"Ours would be swallowed by it about six times," answered Charles, "It has only low banks in front of the store, but further up the valley where the road runs alongside the banks are very high, more like the sides of a narrow ravine, and all crowded with native trees down the very steep sides."

"And the store?" Laura asked. "Is that far up the valley?"

They took turns to tell the interested listeners all about their morning walk. As they crossed the junction where a road ran up to the settlement of Canterbury the track ran through a grove of fine cabbage trees. Then almost at once they were on the banks of a stream (very low banks) which they crossed to the road running past the store. The store-keeper's home was situated on the brow of a hill behind the store, where it nestled among pine trees.

Beyond the store, following the road, there were several farms on the way up to the school which had the teacher's dwelling attached to it. They found the ascent nicely graded and the valley was very prettily placed among a next of hills rising one above the other, with the road curling round the narrow valley between the hills. There were so many hill peaks that William wondered how many of the settlers had thought of climbing even one of the peaks to view the country below.

"The walk across is quite within your capabilities, my dear," said William, as he put down his napkin and looked across at the clock on the mantelpiece. "I see that we kept you rather late."

"Well, Mother and the girls will have nothing to do" said Charles as they rose from the table. "George and I will wash up and leave everything just as nice as usual. Isn't that so, young fellow?"

"Hear! Hear!" said George, "If they'll go somewhere else, we'll get on like wildfire."

Charles was working hard for an examination which was to be held in Auckland towards the end of the year so as he kept his nose constantly in his books, his mother thought a change of occupation might be a pleasant change for him. Smiling her thanks to the two bright-faced lads who were already at work, she followed the others out of the room.

William had a busy time during the afternoon. Some of the Maoris who lived on the flat below came to see him and they evidently enjoyed the interview as they stayed on when others came, until he was holding an informal reception under the trees on the side of the school grounds. The previous teacher had evidently enjoyed outside meals as he had left a long roughly-built trestle table there, with a home-made bench on each side of it. The family was very pleased when they found it there, and the table was very useful in many ways during pleasant weather.

William told Laura at the dinner table that evening that he had been astonished at the excellent English spoken by the Maoris that afternoon.

"It surprised me very much, but I suppose they have been accustomed to living here with European settlements near them. They would have no difficulty in making themselves understood anywhere."

"Why did you wish Mother to go and speak to them this afternoon, Father?" asked Freddie, "They were all Maori men."

Charles was amused at her remark, as her father replied, "My dear, I knew they were all men. They are representatives of the local tribes and as such it was only right for them to expect me to present your mother to them. We are living amongst them- educating their children, or soon will be---as well as hoping to be a help to them and their families in times of sickness, or trouble. I think they were all agreeably surprised to find her a very kind and understanding woman."

Louisa looked reprovingly at her sister. Although quite a young girl, she had known why Mother had straightened her cap and glanced in the mirror when William came into the sittingroom to find her.

"You should know, Freddie, that teachers and their schools are the pivot of communal life. It is through teachers, mainly, that the children have the chance of learning the proper way of life. Mother is venerated by them all, as you know by the Otaua Maoris. Isn't that so, Father?"

Louisa ended with an appealing glance at her father, who was quietly listening to her reproof.

Seriously, to match her remarks, he replied, "Certainly, my dear. You are very near the mark. If there were no schools there would be little, or no progress in any community. Parents are supposed to teach their families of pre-school age, three rules of life--- truthfulness, obedience and courtesy. If they did that, work would not be so strenuous, so heart-breaking for teachers. They have to try to undo the harm which many have learnt in their very early years in their own homes. It is often a thankless and uphill task for conscientious teachers where it could be a pleasant duty if they had the co-operation of parents."

Charles said quickly, "Of course, Father, you are speaking of the teachers who put their whole heart and soul in their work. But I can remember when, at school, our headmaster was away, and the Board sent us a young reliever to fill the position temporarily. He constantly grumbled that a teacher's life was a fool's life as there were so many rules and regulations governing his work. He often said it was only a job for him, and as soon as school was over he was glad to see the last of us."

"I have met that sort of young man, more often young women, who should not be in the teaching profession. I quite agree that when I was teaching in the Board school, I felt very strongly on the subject of parental neglect in the homes. Some drag their families up in the same way that they were brought up, and it is almost impossible to enjoy teaching when one has the neglect of those homes to contend with. Instead of nicely behaved children, one has to control classes of uncouth young barbarians."

"Is that why you like teaching in the Native schools, Father?" asked Louisa, who was very interested in the discussion.

"Not entirely, Louisa. As a rule, I found that the settlers in Taranaki had brought up their families in the hard way. Life was too hard for the parents to waste time in spoiling their offspring. They had to jump at their parents' bidding, and do whatever they were told, and no argument about it. I found in the town schools that some of the children belonging to the same station in life were disorderly, untruthful and difficult to handle. They did what they liked in their own homes and brought their uncontrolled manners to school with them. What their descendants will be like, I dare not like to think about. Probably forming the unpleasant and rough section of any town or city they make their homes in."

George had been taking everything in but saying nothing. When his father finished speaking, he spoke hurriedly, "Don't you think, Father, that many of our settlers here must be like the Taranaki settlers? I mean, in making their children behave at once, and do what they are told without answering back. I've noticed after Sunday school, while we are waiting outside for church to begin, that you can pick the careful parents at once. If they tell their youngsters to do something, they do it directly, but there are a number of mothers who are plain silly, I think."

"Why?" asked his father as the boy paused.

"Well, Father, the children answer them back and squabble with their mothers. I've noticed how rude some of them are, when I've been wandering round looking for someone to chat with."

"You are very observant, George, and I am glad you notice such things and think them over. It does us all good to notice these rudenesses as we are then not likely to fail in that way ourselves."

To his astonishment they all laughed merrily, and in reply to his look of enquiry, Laura said, as she rose from the table, "I am quite sure you would never need to blame yourself on that score, William."

"Well, my dear, I was only pointing out that as the parents behave

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in the privacy of their own homes, the children will act in public. A good or bad example is quickly copied by those who love us, but so many parents forget that fact, and do not trouble to train their little ones at all. Train before seven, less scolding before eleven, was the motto of the old nannas who ran the nurseries of our forefathers in the British Isles, and these old nannas had a great deal of common sense in their make-up, if they suffered from a lack of education, they made up for that lack by their sound natures and kindly dispositions."

CHAPTER TWENTYFIVE

Laura was out in the front garden. She had been forking round the roots of some of the plants they had carried with them from Otaua, and now sat back upon her heels and contemplated her work.

"How often I used to help my Dad with his huge flower garden," she mused. "I seemed to be always out in the garden, or else helping in the vegetable garden that ran from the back side-door of The Pines to the front lane. How William would love to transplant that garden to this place. He used to walk up and down the rows of blackcurrant and guava bushes with my Dad, and he often said to me that a man could live in that heavenly garden and beautiful home with his books, and wish to do nothing but read, study, and potter in the two large gardens."

Picking up her little fork and trowel, she rose to her feet, shaking out her full skirts and straightening her twisted belt, she thought, "It is about time the children returned with the little ones. I'll see to the kettle and get things ready for our dinner."

Hastening to the kitchen she flung the window open to the afternoon sunshine. It was not long before she had the dinner cooking quietly on the hot stove and a batch of currant buns in the oven. As she worked she thought of her girlhood days, and of the passing of her mother. She had died in her early forties, leaving her husband and four daughters to mourn their loss.

From a high spirited and gay man, the girls had watched their father change overnight into the grave-faced and quiet man, that, except for periodical returns to his light and gay spirits, he remained throughout the rest of his life. His heart had been centred in his pretty and accomplished wife, and the blow of her loss had been a deep and lasting one. He and Laura had spent many hours gardening when he was on short leave from the House and they often spoke of the loved and lost one. His duties often kept him chained to Wellington, so the girls enjoyed his trips back to New Plymouth.

Mary, the eldest daughter, managed the home and the maids efficiently. She always said that she was very fond of housework when someone else was doing it, and that was the keynote of her character, as far as work was concerned. In wood-carving, music, painting and fanciwork of all kinds she excelled.

Laura had studied music from a very early age, and was very fond of it. With Mary, she had attended classes for hobbies, but where Mary kept them all up and devoted most of her mornings to one or other of them, Laura preferred knitting, crocheting, gardening and fine sewing, of all the others.

She had been very glad that she was an efficient seamstress, when she found it necessary for her to take the sewing classes in school. It was true that she painted and did a little sketching, but she reserved those accomplishments for lighter moments instead of joining with Mary with the visiting and trips which the latter often indulged in. It was nothing for Mary to plan a round of pleasure in New Plymouth with other young people, and then pack her luggage and go across country to Napier, or the Wairarapa, leaving her friends in the lurch and enjoying a few months away from Taranaki.

Jessie was many years younger than Mary and was a sweet-faced girl with a mop of shining hair.

Her father had been afraid that she would miss her mother's fond care so sent her to a boarding school in Wellington. He had many friends in that city and he knew that some of their wives would take an interest in the child. She went home to The Pines for long vacations but spent her short ones in Wellington or Picton.

When William and Laura married her father married again within the same year. Laura had been urged to have her first confinements at her father's home. The house was big and there was plenty of room for a trained nurse, so after some persuasion on her father's and step-mother's part she had been glad to accept, as William was teaching then some miles out of town.

Some years later both Mary and Jessie married and were busy furnishing their own homes, so The Pines was never the same to any of the first family although they, and, later, their families always received a welcome when they chanced to be in New Plymouth. But that came later. Laura pulled her thoughts from the past and the possible future as she heard the noise of the children's feet as they rushed along the gravelled path to the back door.

Laura was popping a madeira cake into the oven as the children came quietly in. She was glad that she had been able to get quite a useful amount of baking done, having the kitchen to herself.

"We saw Father and George coming over the paddocks," cried Freddie, "so I thought I'd better bring the little ones back. We had the loveliest baths under the waterfall and then climbed up to the first clearing on the hill where we could see all over the flats.

"We had to take turns bathing," cried Constance, beginning as soon as her sister stopped for breath. "The pool is only big enough to hold two wee children at once, so I had to wait."

"Anyway, you all look very fresh and bright," remarked Laura, her eyes taking in the sweet smiling faces at a glance, "I am glad you are home. You must first hang out your towels and then set the table in the other room. Don't forget some fresh flowers for the vases."

She heard William's footsteps just outside the door. The girls rushed out to intercept George and to hear all the news while William put down a bundle of mail.

"Quite a number of letters, my dear," he observed, kissing her flushed cheek. "You should not have cooked on such a hot day. That cooking looks very appetising, though. I hoped you would have rested while we were away."

"I enjoyed myself," smiled Laura, "I did some gardening and then it got too hot, so that I came in and began this cooking."

"Well, spare a moment and read your letters. There are plenty of them," answered William, passing over a pile of correspondence. He sat down on the window seat and began to open his Home letters, before scanning those from nearer home.

Laura perched on a high stool and slit a letter open that was addressed in her father's writing. Before she read it she addressed William, "Excuse me, dear, did you bring any for Charles or Louisa?"

"They are all among your pile," he returned absently, his thoughts far away in the little town of Exmouth, in the south of England. Laura sorted them out and put hers by themselves. Looking across to speak to William and seeing his expression of deep concentration, she picked up her father's letter and began to read.

Freddie came in to ask her mother something but seeing them both deep among their letters she crept out to the others, saying, "I can't talk to her yet. They never even noticed me. All I could hear was "Ah, Ah, Oo, oh, Ah! Aa-a-a-ah!"

The children laughed merrily. It seemed so amusing to think of grown-ups being so interested in letters when the sunshine and the glad breeze was calling them outside.

George, however, was not amused. "That's quite enough, Freddie," he said, "When you are as old as they are you'll enjoy having people write

to you. Nobody'll get a word out of you, then."

"Well! I do enjoy letters now, but it made me laugh to see them so buried in what they were reading. It really looked funny, George, but I suppose I shouldn't have said anything."

She skipped away with a glass water jug for the table. Their house tanks were so low that they drew their drinking water from the school tanks, as they had two enormous ones just outside the side gate, leading into the school ground.

One tank stood on a very high stand and it was quite fun when it rained to hear the rain-drops tinkling into the tank with a merry little tune. Freddie often donned an old macintosh and crouched beneath the stand when it rained, as she loved to hear the tinkling drops of music.

When she returned to the house she found that Charles and Louisa had returned from Omapere. They had walked over the hills with some young people from Waiotemarama, who were always planning walks with them as they openly confessed that they had never known what a great pleasure one could get from walking over hill and dale; so Charles had many enjoyable walks when they could spare an afternoon.

"Let us leave all the mail here until after dinner," suggested Laura. "Then we can have a good browse over the papers as well."

So when everything was ready they adjourned for dinner, and as Laura looked round the table at the assembled family she made up her mind to enjoy every moment of their lives together. "I had not realised that they are growing up so fast. It will not be long before one slips away to a new home, and then the family will go on shrinking. When one leaves the home nest, the others get restless and it is hard to keep them from feeling their wings."

Charles, later, read his letters quietly. He had missed some of his boy friends and was glad to find they still wished to keep in touch with him. The walk over the hills had been very refreshing and the young people had called at a mutual friend's home to rest awhile.

"It is too bad no one wrote to poor little me," cried Louisa, as she came into the pleasant kitchen after helping to tidy the dining room, and other little chores.

"Charles pushed his pile over to her. "You may read mine," he said, "You should reply to your correspondents sooner. Here is all the latest Punakitere and Taheke news."

He rose presently when Louisa had finished, and said, "Come on, I promised the youngsters to play "Beggar my neighbour". You'll play, won't you?"

After reading and discussing the many letters Laura and William picked through the papers. She began to gather them up until he said, "I don't think I will move from here tonight, dear. It is comfortable and the children are very noisy in the next room."

"Well, it is about time for the little ones to go to bed. I know Charles and Louisa wish to play chess afterwards. But if you are staying it will be nice, as I have to set the dough for tomorrow's bread."

William laughed, "That settles it. You sound so workmanlike. I'm often amused at myself when I think of the time I would have been horrified at the thought of sitting in a kitchen and enjoying myself. Of course, things are very different when one's home is run by one's womenfolk, instead of a staff of maids who would look sideways at one for thinking of entering his own kitchen."

"I've thought of that sometimes," confessed Laura, "I remember that when we had Polish or German girls, or even one of British origin, they always looked very surprised when I went in. It was different with Mary when my mother died, because she became housekeeper, and went about with her bunch of keys jingling at her waist. She went in whenever she wished to give an order about something. The cook came in every morning to the dining room to discuss the day's meals with her."

"I can just imagine Mary doing that and enjoying herself very much!" William chuckled. "She must have been very disgruntled when your father presented a new mistress to the old home. No one could blame him. Anyway

Mary had a man in sight and you and I were living at Waitara. The house needed someone efficient to take over."

"I suppose there is something in that," assented Laura, "I knew that Mary was most indignant about it. Don't you remember when my Dad asked you if she could live with us? When you and he argued because he wished to pay her board. It was just because she could not bear to live there under the new conditions, even if only for a year or two."

"I recall that we were quite glad to have my income increased just then. It was really very pleasant having Mary in the house and she was company for you when I was at school. Don't you remember we started our little library with your father's donations, as he used to call his monthly cheque?"

"Well," laughed Laura, "I am quite sure that you would never have agreed to spend that money on anything but books, so it was really a good thing when Mary got married."

"No, I am quite sure that I would not have taken the cheque, had we not spent it in that way. Taking the money from your father seemed to give it a different feeling when using it so. He was most annoyed when I at first said we couldn't consider it, but when we compromised he actually seemed quite grateful."

Laura put the pan of dough on a small corner table and covered it with a white tea-cloth and then with a square of new white blanketing.

"There," she said, "I'll just wash my hands and then we'll have another few minutes over those lovely magazines your brother Fred sent, then the children must go to bed. They seem so happy and Charles may not be here much longer to play with them."

She went out to wash the dough from her fingers as she never left her dough until it rubbed smoothly between finger and thumb, without leaving a mark behind. Then she and William read and chatted.

After the children were in bed and Charles and Louisa had played their game of chess they came out to the kitchen together.

"Why didn't you come into the other room?" asked Charles. "Louisa and I could have played at the small table."

"Charles won, Father. I never seem to be able to catch him out," cried Louisa, not waiting for them to reply to her brother.

"You must concentrate more," replied William, who was devoted to chess, and was pleased because the boys were, even now, worthy opponents. "That is really your worst fault at chess. Concentrate as you do over your composition in German and French, and the boys will respect your chess playing."

Then he remembered an earlier remark so he continued, "I don't mind where I sit, my dear Charles, as long as it is in my own house. This room was warm and comfortable and we were busy. By the way, Laura, what about Rosina Cartwright's letter? Should we not discuss that now that the others are not here?"

"Oh, yes," Laura replied, looking through her pile of letters. "Sit down, dears, and we'll soon decide the fate of the Nations."

"You make me feel quite curious, Mother," said Charles, "I presume it is something about Louisa, as I'm not due for a letter from the Auckland Education Board."

Laura smiled at him rather sadly, he thought. Then she found the letter and read aloud the part concerning Louisa. "There," she said at last, "They could not offer any young girl a finer position, especially when you are untrained."

"Oh! Mumsy," and Louisa clapped her hands in an ecstasy of delight. "How lovely! I can hardly wait to hear what you and Father decide."

William looked at his young daughter with tender eyes. He had always been so proud of the manner in which she attacked her lessons, and her pleasure at surmounting any difficulty when she wrote compositions in those languages.

"I think we would be very wrong in throwing any obstacle in the way of your accepting such an offer," he said, "Rosina offers you quite a nice sum weekly, for your personal expenses, every other she will pay for-----"

expenses incurred in tripping about, or concerts or similar pleasures and you will continue your French and German under their visiting tutor, while you help with the younger children's lessons each day. You are perfectly capable of doing that."

"Your father will miss your help with classes but this is such an exceptional chance that we are only too pleased for your sake," said her mother.

Charles and Louisa looked at each other, she nodded, so he said to his parents, "It is rather strange that this should have turned up today. We were both speaking about Louisa's chance of doing something useful, now that the younger ones are able to help. I know you'll miss her very much, but the break must come one day."

William and Laura both agreed with his words. William had refused the Misses Horne's offer to take the two elder girls to live with them while attending a college nearby, as he could not bear being under any obligation to anyone, even though the girls may have benefitted by the chance.

So he was pleased that something had turned up to help Louisa, as his salary did not allow any further outlay after the household expenses were met. He spent as much time each evening as he could furthering their education, as he was determined that his family should be equal to that of anyone who they would ever meet in New Zealand. He did not intend their education to suffer on account of his lack of a large bank balance.

William knew that many thought that his family was too strictly bound by restrictions but he did not care for any outside opinions so long as he and Laura were satisfied.

Had he lived to meet any of his grandchildren he would have been pleased to find that his children carried out his belief in no outside interference in their upbringing of their own offspring. He used to say that no educated person who conducted his own life in a proper fashion should brook any outside interference in the control of his own affairs.

They all discussed the subject for some time, then Louisa helped her mother to get supper ready.

Charles said to his sister as they enjoyed biscuits and a hot drink, "We'll be able to see something of each other, Louisa, when I get to town, as the Cartwrights often run their launch into Auckland harbour and spend a few days there. I know the aunts would gladly put you up for the time, and they would take you everywhere."

"That would be lovely," exclaimed Louisa, "When they stayed here that time, Rosina said she felt as though we were sisters, though I was so young. She wouldn't hear of us calling her anything but Rosina, although I couldn't imagine myself calling Mr Cartwright 'Guy'."

Charles laughed with Louisa, as the same gentleman was elderly, with a stiff and formal manner which seldom seemed to relax. His wife was years younger and the family were younger than Louisa.

They often ran their launch into the Hokianga harbour and spent their Christmas holidays in a large house in Omapere, which they took on a yearly lease. Having called on William and Laura when they first came to the school, armed with a letter of introduction from the Hornes, the two families had been almost inseparable during the holiday periods and they had all enjoyed many trips on the launch, both up and down the beautiful harbour or round the coast-line.

Laura said they must discuss other details the next day and go through Louisa's wardrobe to see what she required.

"The Cartwrights dress their own children very plainly. So a number of your own clothes, supplemented by those which your Grandmother sent you, should tide you over for some considerable time," she added.

Charles agreed with his mother. "I never felt badly dressed when I went to Auckland for my examinations and you know the aunts are very exacting," he said. "They always said I looked very smart and added that I had never appeared countrified. They never, at any time, found fault with anything I wore."

William said that Charles could congratulate himself as the aunts

would not hesitate to criticize anything that they did not like.

Then he and Charles went out to tie up the dog and to see if the big school gates on the lower road were closed.

William had found cattle browsing in the paddock in early mornings sometimes, and, later, some drover had come along and claimed them. He said they had strayed and possibly found the gates open. It had happened too often to be a case of cattle straying accidentally, so now William kept the gates padlocked at night.

Laura gossiped with Louisa for a few minutes while they washed the supper things. Then they kissed each other and Louisa went slowly from the room, her head full of dreams and her eyes of stars as she quietly prepared for bed. She loved her dear home but the outside world was calling to her of new paths to follow and new fields to explore.

CHAPTER TWENTYSIX

A few days later when Charles had returned from the Waiotemarama Post Office where he had called for mail he brought a large number of letters and papers of all sorts.

Laura was reading one from her father who had written a long screed about the experiments that he and a friend were carrying out in the latter's workshop. They were still working on their ironsand project but seemed to have reached a check in some new experiment although they had both spent a large sum of money in installing new machinery for their work. He spoke about their certainty that the sand would prove profitable. Speaking of various friends who had the same faith in it as he had, he said it was not as if cutlery had not been made from it already. Quoting some sentences to prove his contention he said a South Canterbury farmer had returned from a trip to England in 1862 and had said so in a letter to him of that date. He said, "quoting from my friend, John Hall, of November, 1862, 'While in England I heard and saw a good deal of the Taranaki steel matter----the steel itself is first rate; every article of cutlery which I brought out is made from it, and I never had anything as good. Mosely told me that they were only deterred from making larger articles of it by having only a small supply of sand. I am satisfied that Taranaki sand will one day prove a source of great wealth to the Province and to those people who may be able to work it. If I had not a good many irons in the fire here, I would be tempted to try to get my finger in the pie. I hope you will, and that better times are dawning for your noble Province.

Ever yours sincerely,

(Signed) John Hall."

"and my father goes on to say that ever since that time he has never lost faith in the future of Taranaki's ironsand. He thinks it will be his fate for it to be reaping honour and glory many years after he is dead and buried. Poor dear, he has worked over it for so long. I seem to remember him talking of his experiments with the ironsand ever since I was a wee girl in socks."

William was interested, "It is generally some small detail that is discovered after the first people to moot the project are dead and gone," he said, "The man who finds that detail is remembered ever after as the discoverer of such and such a project, often a fortune making project. The first scientists are rarely called to mind by the firm who finally puts any discovery on the market----or very seldom seem to be remembered." William had put down his own mail to listen to his father-in-law's letter. "The poor Major has always had his heart set on proving the worth of the ironsand," he said.

"Yes, he isn't doing it because he wants wealth----no man is less commercial minded than he is, or else he would sell that pine plantation which gave his property its name. So many men have suggested it to him, but he is determined not to allow an axe to touch one of them. And yet, with that big plantation he could have made any amount of money to help with his experiments. But, No! His father had them planted when he first came out and in the short time he had left--- none are to be touched.

It is tragic, though, because when he goes, someone will buy the property at a pitifully cheap price---land is quite cheap---and make a pile out of the timber."

"Never mind, dear, I suppose he has strong sentiments on the subject. As you say, he never did care for money, so the trees mean more than gold to him."

"Well, I'm sure he does deserve some luck over those experiments, as they have both been working on them since I was quite young."

"Don't look so sad about it, my dear. I'm sure he is perfectly happy at the work, though with all his other activities I am sure I don't know how he spares time for it. Here is a letter from my mother, so this should cheer you up. She was just sent off another parcel so the family will be delighted. Fred is going home on Army leave so she is looking forward to it, or was when she wrote."

Fred was William's younger brother, whose regiment was then stationed in Egypt.

The girls were delighted at the thought of new dresses, and other garments. They always greeted the parcels with joy when they arrived with thoughtful regularity from their grandmother in Exmouth.

The young people had seized their own letters and taken them out to the work-table under the trees. There they prepared the vegetables, did their sewing, read, and played table games, besides wrestling with homework problems day by day. They had letters from some of the members of the G-J family, speaking of missing them at the services and for their usual weekly activities.

Charles was interested, he had a long one from Will, but he commented with unusual insight for one still in his mid-teens, "I expect they do miss us now, but it won't be long before they have filled our vacant places with others who will, probably suit them just as well as companions, if not better."

The girls said nothing, but thought that although only a little over a year had elapsed since they left their loved valley, the friends they had left behind were veiled by a faint mist which would grow deeper as time went on. They knew, however, that no matter how long they lived, the beautiful bush scenery, the lovely climbs to the many hilltops around, and the soft babbling of the creek waters as they rippled over the pebbles below their once dear little home and sweet-scented garden, would be forever green in the background of their memories. Louisa sighed, as she thought of those happy days that had vanished into the closed chapter of their childhood.

William and Laura were agreeably pleased at the type of child they had to teach in Waimamaku. They were mentally alert and very quick at their work, which was a distinct advantage over pupils they had previously in some newly opened schools, who had seldom met a white person before.

He and Laura enjoyed their work among the Maoris and looked forward to working in the district for some years. The years slipped away very happily.

The storekeeper had been taking the afternoon services when William arrived at the school. It was not long before he was asked to take his turn on alternate Sundays. He soon had a few friends with whom he could discuss subjects dear to his heart, but Laura did not think --with the exception of one or two---that they ever took the place of Mr G-J, Mr Holt and Mr Symonds in William's affections.

Charles also found a few kindred spirits of his own age with whom he went fishing and climbing. He looked forward to the shooting season when he would go with several to shoot wild pigeons, and trail round isolated swamps watching for a good fat pheasant. When the season came he never really enjoyed shooting the pretty pigeons, as he said they just sat trustfully on the high branches of the huge bush trees and there was no sport in it. To him, it seemed as cruel as shooting a pet bird but they were so plentiful that it was quite possible to get a good bag in a short while and they made excellent roasts, or savoury stews for the table.

Charles enjoyed pheasant shooting as he said the bird was as clever as the sportsman and he was always proud to bring a couple home after an interesting stalking session.

The family were friends with a Mr and Mrs Power, of the Board school at upper Waimamaku. Mr Power and Charles would meet on a Saturday morning and walk miles after a pheasant or wild ducks.

George was too young to use a gun, though he was always interested in watching his brother ram a charge home, as they did in those days of the old style of shotgun. His love was for horseflesh, and he knew most of the horses round the district by sight, and many by the particular clip-clop of their hoofbeats.

He often said he could not imagine why some rode the old creaks they did, when New Zealand could breed horses like Carbine. A picture of that horse hung beside his bed, and he compared every horse he saw with Carbine. His fancy was not the one that suffered by the comparison.

The bigger girls, also, found friends in the settlements, and they thought nothing of walking four or five miles to spend the day at a friend's home, afterwards entertaining their friends in the same way at their own home.

The little girls were petted and made much of everywhere and the baby, 'B' was loved by everyone.

Life was going on very happily when Charles left to take up a position in a school in Epsom, Auckland. They all missed him very much, but the change was greatly to his advantage as he was able to attend lectures at Varsity and had many a pleasant time at "Fernbank" in Parnell, where Laura's two aunts had lived for so long. Charles loved the beautiful home and met many friends of the family there from time to time. Both Mary and Constance constantly called upon him to escort them to various functions and other affairs, so he had to "swot" every spare moment he had so as to be ready to respond to their requests. With every moment filled he still found time to write his usual weekly letter home.

Freddie was getting her wardrobe in order, as she was expected to spend a year among her mother's relatives in Taranaki, when there came a bolt from the blue which startled the Coast dwellers out of their pleasant and careless day to day existence, and plunged the whole district into a state of anxiety and watchfulness.

It seemed that someone had received a telephone message from someone living high up the river which told of the Maoris of the Mahurehure tribe rising in revolt against the dog-tax levied by the Hokianga County Council. No one knew later where the word came from, or the identity of the person first responsible for the news travelling the Coast in such a short space of time. Everyone seemed to know of the rising at the same time and excitement and anxiety mounted hour by hour as garbled news dribbled out from, seemingly Rawene, but that was something no one could verify later.

Events happened so fast and news that was in everyone's mouth one hour was contradicted the next by an entirely different rumour. The Maori warriors were armed to the teeth, it was said, and were now here and now said to be there, but everyone agreed that they were marching straight down the mail road without molesting anyone. Their goal was said to be Rawene where they were going to chase the pakeha out and make things most unpleasant for the County Council. Some said the Maoris were breathing out fire and brimstone and the Europeans had better beware of forcing an issue. One hundred and fifty men, women, and children were evacuated from Rawene to Kohukohu, a saw-milling centre down the river.

It is hard to recall now how things worked out day by day as so many conflicting rumours were broadcast to be contradicted soon after by a fresh lot of terrifying tales. The way of the marching Maoris lay through the peaceable settlement of Waima, and the friendly Maoris there fled to the bush as they did not wish to be drawn into the fray.

The schoolmaster at the Native school there was said to have sent all his womenfolk away, except for one young daughter who would not leave him.

This blonde and brave maiden remaining at the telephone which was connected with Rawene, until the Maoris were almost within coo-ee of the school premises, when it was generally understood that the teacher and his young daughter escaped through the kitchen window into the bushes beyond. They were not to know then that they may have been quite safe had they not left, as they were on very good terms with the Maori people. Every white man and woman expected to be butchered should one cross the path of the Maori war-party. The two members of the teacher's family who kept Rawene in constant awareness of the progress of the warriors through the settlement were afterwards highly commended by the Authorities for their brave devotion to duty and the public welfare, in face of what may have been a very grave danger.

Excitement was rife on the Coast when the news came that about three hundred armed Maoris marched into the Rawene township, but neither damaged nor stole anything, a few contenting themselves by kicking in the door of the teacher's house.

Everyone heard about the telegrams of defiance which the leaders sent to the House of Parliament which was replied to by the dispatching of the Government steamers, Tutanekai and Hinemoa, with one hundred and twenty of the Permanent Force, two Nordenfeldt field guns and two maxims.

They also dispatched the gunboat Torch. The Maori warriors did not wait for the boats to arrive, but withdrew along the road towards Waima, and awaited the troops there.

On May fifth, 1898 when Lieutenant-Colonel Newall marched his column with the two maxims over the hills, they marched into a Mahurehure ambush. They would have been shot to pieces, being taken unawares, if the ambuscade had not received last-minute orders not to fire, from Hone Toia. Hone Toia was the rebel leader.

The Mahurehure leaders, listening to the pleadings of the Maori member for Northern Maori, Mr Hone Heke, M.P. surrendered the next day. They were tried for treason and sentenced to terms of imprisonment. The rest of the party went quietly back to their homes and that was the end of the years of secret preparation which they had carried out without the knowledge of the more prominent tribes of Hokiangā.

It seems strange now to think of but the fact remained that no-one felt nervous of the other tribes living so peacefully round them, while all this stir and bustle was on. No Maori spoke to any Europeans of the events taking place in Rawene, and they carried on in their homes and fields as though all was well with the world. At the same time, they must have been conscious of an undercurrent of uneasiness lest the trouble was not quelled peaceably. The Europeans had known and respected those tribes for so many years, that even when one tribe breathed fire and brimstone, it did not occur to one person to distrust the Maoris living nearby. If the revolt was fraught with danger at the time, it helped to cement the bonds of friendship more firmly than before between the white community and their Maori brothers and sisters. In that way, mutual respect has grown and strengthened through the years, although it is true that many ignorant Europeans have still no idea of the beauty and poetry that dwells in the soul of our Maori friends.

We can only pity the narrow minds and the ignorant vision of those unable to appreciate the fine qualities of nobler spirits, that only need a wider education and helpful understanding to reach a high plane of Life.

CHAPTER TWENTYSEVEN

It was a very hot afternoon in late autumn. The lengthening shadows cast a pleasant shade wherever the tall trees grew, and Laura and the children were sitting round the table in their delightful retreat beyond the side windows, each one busily engaged in cutting up pie-melon and lemons for jam to be made the next day.

As soon as school was over William and George had each seized a sugar-bag and hurried off down the road to the mussel rocks on the beach, beyond the river's mouth.

Under the trees they had been speaking of the trouble among the Mahurehure tribe, and Laura had been astonished to hear how the words of the little girl, Iwi Ngaru, spoken so long ago, had lived in the minds of her elder children.

"Yes," finished Freddie, who had been speaking of the cruel fear that had haunted them through the years. "I was really quite glad when everything came to a head. It seemed better for things to blow up then than to be bottled up for years and years longer." Laura looked at her daughter with a very gentle expression on her sweet face.

"We had no idea that you girls even remembered those remarks. Your father once said that he thought he had dispelled any fears you girls may have had."

Freddie shook her head slowly. "No, one does not forget so easily. We used to lie and scarcely breathe on those wild, windy winter nights, dreading to hear the war-cries around the house. But it is all over now, Mother dear, could you finish your story about Great grandfather? I have often thought about him, only we seem to have so many other things to think about now."

Her mother's eyes twinkled. "Age does bring its responsibilities, dear, and you are beginning to realise it now. However, I mustn't tease, as it doesn't really seem so long since I was a young thing myself. I think I told you their wanderings through the valleys and over the beautiful hills of Italy.

"My father often spoke of their lives in Florence. He said that he was generally busy with his tutors, but sometimes his father took him round during a carnival, or on the feast days. He spoke of indolent men and languid ladies with all their fine airs and graces, and often made me laugh by describing some of them. They used to forget that he spoke French and Italian like the natives themselves, because they would flirt their fans and veil their eyes coquettishly, while they discussed their various flirtations. They always called Charles Armitage, "The Enigma" as they could never understand him, although they all seemed to be fascinated by his reticence when they trespassed upon his personal affairs. He seemed to be a general favourite everywhere, and they evidently tried to reach him through his son's affections, as my father said he was often quite embarrassed by the fuss they made over him when C A B was around.

"Some he liked very much, the others he spoke of as gay butterflies with little mind or soul, only a craving for the gaiety and glitter of the life in those merry circles. His father enjoyed the life there for a while, or saw the season through, but he told my Dad that he was always delighted to get out among the hills again."

"Didn't Grandpa Brown lose a lot of schooling in that way" enquired one of the interested children.

"Yes," replied Laura, "but his father thought that the healthy life and the close insight he received into the lives of the poor people would compensate for the loss of the tutors through those months. It may have helped him, later, out here, in his Parliamentary campaign because his understanding and sympathy with people less favoured in life has been a great asset, and gained him many friends. But we have finished the cutting up now, and thank you all for helping me so much. I must see how the pots and pans on the stove are getting on. Your father won't be long now, and I want to have dinner ready for them when they get back."

As the children followed her into the house, each carrying something from the worktable, Freddie asked eagerly, "Mother, you will tell us more about those old days soon, won't you? Don't wait for Louisa to come, as I'll tell her everything."

"Well, dear, we don't expect her for a holiday for some considerable time yet, so you must remember to ask me anytime we are working together." William and George returned from the beach with their mussels which they put into a tub of coldwater with oatmeal sprinkled over them. They knew they would then be quite fresh the next day, when they would be prepared for lunch.

The next afternoon, George took the usual short cuts across the Maori paddocks until he reached the cabbage tree grove, as the family had named the gully running up the hillside which they skirted to reach their stepping stones. He spent some time looking round some of the great cabbage tree roots that showed in twisted coils above the ground, very thick and muscular in appearance, George always thought. He and Charles had often searched for greenstone and old tools belonging to past generations of Maori warriors. The Otatau Maoris had told them that, during tribal wars, the warriors and their wahines had often hidden their valuables under those trees in case of the battle going against them. Sometimes most of the tribe would be wiped out and the rest taken prisoner and the valuables would never be found as the secret of the hiding place would be lost. With so many cabbage trees up and down the gullies, the victorious party would be unable to locate any hiding place. One old Maori had told George that they chose those trees as they were sacred trees to the tohungas.

George could not spare any more time just then, as he knew that his father would be waiting for the mail. Dusting his fingers on some fern leaves, he thought sadly, "It never seems to be my luck to find any greenstone anyway, so I'd better get my real errand done, or I'll be late home."

The Post Office was attached to the store, so George got their mail and some groceries and hurriedly left for home. When he arrived there he found his Uncle Edward in the sittingroom, chatting with his father. They both greeted the boy and his uncle commented on the way George had "sprouted" since their last meeting.

George blushed with pleasure, and said, "Thankyou, Uncle, I'm glad you are here."

The uncle in question had been in the Navy. When he left the service he had found himself a square peg in every round hold he tried to fill. Among the positions he had occupied was when he was in the West Indies on a trip to see his relatives out there. They had lost their overseer on the sugar plantation so he stepped into the breach. The work had been interesting and he stayed for some months while they looked for someone who would be there permanently. One tale he told his nieces and nephews had always a charm for them. He said he was inspecting the sugar in some of the vats when his foot slipped and head over heels he went into the rich vatful. When helped out, he was "swarmed" by little dark children who licked him from top to toe, before he could get out of their clutches!

He had wandered from country to country and had finally found a niche in North Auckland. The girls used to say that he was the most charming man for an uncle that anyone could wish for, and they were all sorry that his visits were usually short ones.

He was now explaining that he intended to spend a fortnight with them before leaving on a business trip to the Bay of Plenty.

How delighted they all were that he was there to walk with them and to visit their many friends around the country. He was in great demand because he had a never-ending fund of short stories to amuse them with, stories that made the children run to their maps and pore over them in order to find the many places throughout the world that he had visited.

Once, on a former visit of Edward's William had laughingly told him

that there was no need for him to teach his children Geography because they learnt more from their uncle's stories, than they did from their Geographical readers.

William left the young ones to entertain his brother, while he ran through his mail. Laura had collected hers and taken them out to read while she watched the dinner cook. How thankful she was to have a nice Atlas stove that was so convenient instead of the colonial oven upon which she had to cook in their early days in the Service.

She recalled, with amusement, the time they had been sent a wood-burning stove after an inspector's visit and a few years before they left Otaua; and the delight with which she had watched a Maori man bearing the displaced colonial oven to his cart. The Maori had thanked her as courteously as though she had done him a good turn by letting him take it away. As he climbed into his cart she had thought "Goodbye, old oven, and give your new owner as good service as you gave me."

For the next fortnight the house was full of fun and laughter. Instead of William and Laura having to think of interesting things for the children to do, Edward took charge and kept the whole family interested and amused.

He and William sat up after Laura had given them supper and retired to bed with a book, and talked over their early life in England; their holidays spent in London with an old couple who were their mother's cousins and who had a beautiful home and a large staff of servants in the West End; and of people they had met and places they visited in India, and many other topics. They were able to exchange news which they had received from overseas and both men looked happier for being able to talk over old times. Edward was much in demand in the European settlements and he was sorry his time was too short to allow him to avail himself of the many invitations which were showered on him.

He looked forward to meeting Charles in Auckland and Laura's aunts whom he had previously met in other visits there. They had just returned from wintering in Egypt and the South of France where they had lived in the Artist's Colony, and enjoyed a very free and easy life, very different, Laura thought, from their prim and proper existence in Parnell society.

Edward was interested to learn that the aunts went across to the Continent every other winter. They exhibited pictures in various Art salons and were generally fussed over by fellow artists.

One evening when the children were all asleep in bed, the three adults were sitting out in the garden, as the evening was exceptionally fine, and hot for the time of year.

"Laura", said Edward suddenly, "What became of your pretty Aunt Julie? I have often intended to ask you.?"

Laura laughed, "I remember how you admired her portrait and wouldn't believe she was older than William. She always looked so young. Her husband had something to do with the Martha Mine, some say he owned it, but that was before I grew up to take an interest in those things, so I never enquired when I could have done so. I know they were enormously wealthy, if one may say that, and they went and settled in London."

"What about the family? Did they all go Home?" asked Edward.

"Oh, yes, they finished their education at Home. One girl married Spencer Gollan, the racing enthusiast and Cicely was presented at Court. I remember Mary saying that they had to furnish their family tree to show that she belonged to well-horn parentage. Queen Victoria is always so very strict on those points of etiquette."

The men laughed. William observed, "The time will come, I am sure, when all those rules will be relaxed. When the old lady departs from this world, her son will usher in a new order. Things will be very different, as her son is **very** far from straight-laced."

"I've often thought it will be interesting how everything will change when he becomes King," Edward said, "I fancy anyone with a big rent roll and a gay disposition, never mind parentage, will be accepted in his

circle. At the same time, I'll be so sorry to hear the fine old lady is no more."

William agreed. "She has been a marvellous influence for good all over the Empire. The world will lose the finest Queen and a grand woman, and I doubt if we'll ever see her equal again."

Edward suddenly gave a rollocking laugh, and exclaimed, "William, you know our line comes direct from old King Alfred. I have often thought that if our forbears had not got so dispersed over the world, whether there may not have been an interesting development through the centuries, with one of our old boys challenging the right of one of the old Queen's forbears to the crown of England."

"It is rather too late now to ponder the outcome of such a feat of arms," replied William with an amused expression. "Our people let it go too easily in the days when it was the fashion to lead a rebellion and fight for the possession of the throne of either Scotland or England."

Edward nodded, "You mustn't forget that we, the descendants of Donald Bane (or Ban or Bain) threw in our lot with Edward 1st and later fought for the reigning House during the Wars of the Roses."

William looked thoughtful. "That was when our financial status began to slip, as a House, because we began to live on our capital. In that way, the funds dwindled through the years until the later members had to stand on their own feet."

"There will always be for you" said William.

Edward with a gay laugh, "The knowledge that, as you are the eldest Tobin living now that brothers George and Charles have passed away, your family will take precedence over the remaining members of the Tobin family no matter how long the Line descends through the coming years."

"There is that, of course," replied William, "but without great capital assets I am afraid that any descendants will not get very much out of it, apart from the satisfaction of knowing that old Donald was the 31st King of Scotland----I think that was about it---the relationship in these days butters no parsnips, as some say. That sort of thing is not generally understood in New Zealand and will never again count anywhere as it did in the earlier days of the century."

They fell silent and the thought that one day the news would be flashed round her Empire that the beloved Queen was dead, sobered them and they felt disinclined for idle chatter.

It was not long before they came into the house. After a hurried supper, they soon put out the lights and the darkened house breathed of rest and gentle peace.

CHAPTER TWENTYEIGHT

Freddie was sitting on the edge of her bed in the room which she and Louisa had shared. She missed her sister, although she tried not to show it to the others. In her hand she held a letter which she had read already once, and was now reading it again. It ran....

"Dearest Freddie,

So glad to receive your long letter and to hear all the news. It is very pleasant here and I am studying my German and French for all I'm worth, but I do not suppose I shall ever meet anyone of our ages in New Zealand who will wish to speak either language and I don't suppose there is any chance of my travelling abroad. Still it is Father's wish, and he is always spoken of as being so cultured, that he sees no hope for the world unless we all aim to learn all we can while we are young.

"Do you remember Maisiè telling us all that about men? And saying to be careful not to be treated as they like to treat all girls --- we thought how coarse she was. Well, there are some seemingly very nice young men whom we meet when we go to various functions and evening amusements. There is one I like very much, but you know we both said we would always remember---so far, but out of arms length if we began to like one rather much. So I do think of that always. Enid says I'll die an old maid, but I don't care as there are some sweet ones here."

Freddie could not look into the future and see that her sister married very happily later in the years. The letter dropped from her fingers as her mind wandered to the thought of some of the crude things girls say sometimes when very young. She remembered her mother saying that boys and girls should not have all life's dreams rudely torn, and the beauty of a full existence spoiled before they were old enough to understand the reticence that should underlie all thought and teachings of sex.

In Laura's day, she and the young people of her circle led very sheltered lives. Nothing was discussed before them that would sully the innocent minds which they were expected to carry through life until they met the man of their choice---or had chosen for them by their parents. That young man would expect a girl's mind to be as a sheet of white notepaper, and every mother endeavoured to bring up her daughter unsullied by the crudities and, often, the callousness of life.

Freddie thought of Louisa and wondered about the young man she had evidently noticed above others. She thought, "Yes, I remember Mirrie telling us that we must always keep a man at arm's length, and never to forget it. She said we could be as charming as ever we liked, if we only remembered that. Well, Louisa and I have both many friends here, but they never encroach, not really. The more we look proudly at them, the more they like us. It's nonsense, people saying girls haven't any sense, because I never forget Mirrie saying "Yes, girls, never forget when you grow up, that some men like to treat girls as they treat an orange. They squeeze all the happiness from the girl's life and then throw the peel away." She said she was never going to be the discarded peel on the pavement. Mirrie was a queer girl in some ways and I suppose that is why Father said not to have anything to do with her. She could be very fascinating if she tried, because Louisa and I made up our minds we'd not talk to her, even if everyone else did, but she made such a fuss of us it was hard not to enjoy it."

Later in the afternoon, Freddie tried to draw her mother out on the subject of Mirrie, whom some called Maisie, and who lived in the upper Waimamaku settlement - a girl in her twenties.

"Mother" Freddie pressed, "couldn't you tell me what Father thinks is wrong with Mirrie? She likes boys I know, but I've never heard her laughing coarsely, or behaving in an uncouth manner when she is at a picnic, or anything."

"My dear," answered Laura, "If your father says she is not a girl for you to meet around, that must satisfy you. He hears all the local gossip and he does not like the set she mixes with. That is all." She closed the subject in a decided way. It was no use Freddie persisting in asking how they all knew, or any other question that came to her mind, so she gave up the struggle, thinking that if it suited her mother not to know anything about life until she married, it would not suite her. She hated the things some girls hinted about, and wondered why her mother did not tell her. Of course, Charles would be home for his vacation, he would tell her, so that she wouldn't feel foolish not knowing about things.

When Charles did arrive for his vacation Freddie tackled him as soon as she had him to herself one afternoon.

They had gone over to the school to try out a new song on the organ. William had presented the girls with an "Organ tutor" which they had practiced diligently and under Laura's tuition they had progressed well enough to play hymns and some other simple music. Freddie spent most of her spare time at the organ now that Louisa was no longer at home to wander the hills with her. In the middle of the first page, she swung round on the music stool, and looked at Charles, who was perched on a desk corner just on one side.

"Charles," She began, rather timidly, "Don't you find it hard to know how people live and what they think about? I mean, when you first went to town to live and you met different people. I suppose Father gave you some hints before you left, so that you would never be at a loss to know what to do, or say, no matter what cropped up?"

"Just what exactly do you mean, Freddie?" asked Charles, looking at her

rather keenly, she thought. "Do you mean did Father talk to me and tell me some of the difficulties I would meet with in relation to other people. Where perhaps one's feelings became involved in some way?"

"Yes, Charles," she assented eagerly, "that is it. I find that lots of boys and girls seem to know much more than we do about all sorts of things. We can be quite happy when someone suddenly says something, and everything seems different. I never feel I can get really chummy with anyone now."

"I think I know how you mean that," answered Charles seriously. "When I first left home, all that Father ever said to me was that, however, I may come against things in my new life, I was to remember the traditions of the family---that a gentleman never lets his family down. There was no time for more, as the coach came along and I jumped aboard. He had never said anything before, nor has he since, to amplify his remark, but if I meet people, or a situation which perplexes me, I remember his warning. If it looks as though the ice is rather thin, I skirt it. So far, I have found it to act, but I don't make any close friends nowadays. It seems to me one has to learn to know someone well before considering whether he, or she, is a friend or not. It is all very different from all being children together and growing up friends. Life grows more complex but I meet it by treading carefully."

Freddie listened carefully as Charles spoke, her eyes on the floor. "Thankyou, Charles," she said with warm gratitude kindling her eyes as they met his. "You have helped me so much and I know Louisa will think so, too. It is no use asking Mother because she thinks I want to speak about something 'not quite nice'." she unconsciously copied her mother's careful way of replying when not sure of what was coming next, "and she closes up, or she thinks I've been talking to some they would not think nice people."

Charles considered her remarks. He replied at last. "Father and Mother were brought up under very different circumstances. In the first place, they both had nurses whom they called 'nanna' in those days in the nursery. I expect, with all due respect to our Grandparents, that they were only too glad to get hold of some kindly and motherly person to look after the nurseries and they wouldn't lay down hard and fast rules about what the little ones must, or must not hear. It wouldn't occur to them. So we would never know what our parents heard, as little ones, when old nanna had some of her own kind visiting her. The children would have played about and you may be sure that they learnt many of the facts of life by listening to the nurse and her friends talking in their crude fashion."

"You mean that Mother and Father must have known about things without understanding them." said Freddie eagerly. "Then when they met with some strange situation with a man or woman, they'd know how to meet it with dignity. Because, simply from hearing things from people not on their level, like their nanna and her friends, they would know they should be above that sort of thing."

"Exactly," said Charles, smiling at her. "You were rather smart to see it so quickly. If I were you I would just do that, meet an unusual situation with dignity. It should freeze anyone trying to be familiar, or crude, or whatever one may call it. I'm not very good at explaining these things myself, so I can sympathise with poor Mother. Do as I try to do when I meet an unusual crisis, just tread carefully and keep your head up. It is wonderful how that freezes familiarity."

They chatted for some further time, and then they locked^{up} and went across to the house. Charles joined the rest of the family while Freddie slipped away to her room.

How understanding Charles was! No wonder his schoolmates had said they would "swear" by Charles Tobin, right or wrong, because in the end they knew he would prove to be right. That had been a common saying among the young lads who used to adore Charles when he was still a young boy.

George had enjoyed the saying and kept it up even when Charles had been away for some years trying to crack his oyster of Life. That was another favourite of George's. An old farmer had once said to him, "Well, I ses to you, life is jest like a noyster. The noyster of life I calls it. If you crack it, you sit on top. But if it jest busts in a messy way, you go in and your feet comes on top. It's either up or down-head or feet. You see, young feller, that you land wi' your head right side up."

Freddie sat down and wrote a letter of half a dozen pages to Louisa. She told her about Charles. How wonderful he was in all he did and said. Then she finished up with the conversation in the schoolroom, ending with, 'No matter what you meet, just hold your head up and look as though you don't notice anything. They will soon think before they speak. As Charles says, one has to learn to put everyone in his place. He didn't say what one did if he didn't stay there.'

Charles was intrigued with his baby brother, John. The little boy was high spirited and sweet-natured and a general favourite with all who came to the place. Charles spent much of his holiday playing with the child, and with the little girls who were full of fun and mischief.

He remembered his talk with Freddie, and wished he had been able to help her more, but he thought, that, after all, his parents were naking quite a good job of bringing up such a large family. He had enjoyed his young life at home and trusted the young ones would feel the same as they grew older and began to see other homes and other ways.

As the holidays drew to a close Charles had many a serious chat with his mother, and at other times with William. He had felt very sorrowful for Laura in the death of her father, Major Charles Brown.

He had been run over by the Express when crossing Devon Road in New Plymouth. The train rushed from the cover of large warehouses and crossed the main street before hurling itself between other high buildings and houses until it reached open country.

Major Brown had been half-way over the street, he had never heard the warnings shouted by bystanders as he was inclined to be a little deaf. When the train stopped the poor old gentleman was hurriedly carried away to the hospital grounds where he was identified by one of his twin sons belonging to the second wife's family.

The sudden news had been a dreadful shock to Laura who had always adored him and she had taken some time in getting over it. William had been a kind and sympathetic companion, and they seemed to spend more and more time together.

Charles had enjoyed his Uncle Edward's short stay in Auckland and hoped to see him again on his return trip.

Edward spent three days in the City waiting for a boat for the Bay of Plenty, so he had waited outside the school Charles was teaching in at Epsom, and they joined forces. They spent as much time together as possible. Besides dining at "Fernbank" one evening and taking the two ladies to the Opera afterwards, they had dined at Dr Kinder's and at another home where Edward had a royal welcome, the host being an old Naval officer who had known Edward's parents.

Charles had already a large list of friends and acquaintances in the City, so he was sorry that Edward was not staying longer in Auckland. His friends told him that he stuck too closely to his books and reproached him for not seeing more of them. They said that a little recreation was as good as a holiday and their words proved to be true as Charles returned to his studies with added zest after some pleasant activities.

He wrote to his home each week and always told them the latest news as he knew it would interest his parents who had their own friends in Auckland.

He often thought how strange it was, and really rather a sad thing, that families separated as the children grew to maturity. Sometimes some of them were fated never to meet their brothers and sisters again, or to look upon the loved faces of their aging parents.

"It is that fact," he thought, "that should prove to unbelievers that there is a Heavenly world to come. There would be no sweetness in life nor joy in the thought of the future if we did not believe that we shall

eventually meet in the Halls of God. No matter how tortuous the path or dangerous the way, we must one and all find each other there at last."

CHAPTER TWENTYNINE

One year the whole family spent the Christmas vacation together. It was some years since the elder ones had been home and they noticed a great change in each other and in the little ones who were growing into young teenagers that any parents would have been proud to own.

The house was, of course, too small to hold the family at night, because the boys were no longer small enough to double up in a three-quarter bed, so the girls got to work and scrubbed the school out with a strong disinfectant. It had, as always, been scrubbed and left tidy after school finished, but the girls thought they would like to do the work themselves over again.

They then put in a big double-bed which had been discarded and hung up on the wall of the wash-house. A little baggy in the middle, it was still usable. With two stretchers and an old divan, they had plenty of comfortable beds and the girls used the big schoolroom as their bedroom, boudoir and retreat. It took the boys no time to rig up a useful dressingtable out of wooden cases, and a folding wardrobe equipped with curtains and clothes-hooks on the narrow top framework that they had used once when camping on the beach, completed the comfortable appearance of the girls' temporary bedroom.

Freddie had only once been home since she left to take up a teaching position inland of Whakatane, so she thoroughly enjoyed being among them all. She thought the younger children would hold their own anywhere they went.

Charles and the boys fished in the lagoon and often thought of the rocks on the Waimamaku beach where they had often gathered mussels to take home. They had fished, too, from the rocks when the tide was coming in and occasionally caught a fine schnapper or kahawai, but they found the fish rather wary of hook and line.

William and Laura, they found, had slowed down a little in their activities. They still gardened together as of old and the garden was large and very well cared for, but they walked very little together, as Laura was not so fond of it as she had formerly been.

William walked with the boys and did a little fishing or ran across to the mainland in the weekly launch trip across, or in a launch run by the Maoris. He was still a very great reader. In fact he often said with pride that the whole family were just a 'pack of bookworms.'

Louisa had changed, Freddie thought, as she looked at her walking in the garden. Slim and dainty in a pale blue silvery sheened dress -- rather artistic looking, although she was as gently mannered as of old. The family had always said that no one would know that so much learning was hidden behind her sweet expression and it was quite true as Louisa did not open out to all and sundry.

Many said, later that they had never known she had such a flair for two Continental languages and had her life been otherwise engaged much later during the First World War, she could have held an excellent position as censor or interpreter. But that is looking too far into the future. One afternoon they were all sitting under the tall pine trees at the foot of the garden. It was a beautiful spot, cool and shady there, but a few steps into the sunshine brought the blistering heat around one.

William never liked to waste much time in sitting about so he soon got his hoe and began to work among the beds on the far side of the garden, next to Laura's flower garden which ran straight down from the front of the house to the little grass lawn under the trees.

The climate never worried him. If anyone asked him how he could bear the heat of the afternoon sun, he would return some careless answer,

- although the family knew that he had once said that after becoming

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acclimatised to the Indian sun, no man should worry about the heat of the New Zealand summer. There was very often a draught of cooler air coming from over the water that tempered the hottest shaft of sunshine.

"Mother, you are always working. I never recall seeing you sitting with idle fingers." said Charles looking lovingly at her as she sat knitting a sock.

Laura glanced at him with one of her sweet, motherly smiles that the Maori girls used to call her "pretty laugh with no noise."

"I always seem to find something for them to do. I do not think I could sit long with idle hands, they would grow stiff with age."

George laughed, "Mother, you must always have an excuse for working! Take a hint when you choose a wife, Charles, don't pick one for her fascinating ways. See if she is useful around a house first." They all laughed merrily. Charles bowed towards his brother.

"Thanks for your kind advice, but I've never yet met the girl whom I thought would equal my mother when she was a girl."

Laura laughingly said, "I should bow now, I suppose. If you had known me then, you wouldn't have dreamt that I could cook, even, a potato. Of course I did at cooking class but I never had a chance at The Pines. Some old ladies with marriageable daughters used to say as an aside to young men, "Don't fall for Laura's beauty, she is only a drawingroom hostess. She'd be useless in a kitchen."

"There you are, George, you can't go by looks any longer! They may be combined with the cleverest fingers and a smart brain, judging by your little mother."

George had been laughing mischievously. He now said, "When I want a wife, I'll make up to all the old ladies who wish to marry off their daughters. I'll take down the names of those whom they call absolutely useless and then take my pick from them."

There was a general shout of laughter and Laura observed, "There is quite a lot of truth in that, George, as long as you don't pick one that does happen to be useless."

The girls had been amused over the remarks and Louisa now remarked, "It always amuses me when people talk about being particular about the girls they'll marry, but they don't think that perhaps those girls are particular, also."

"Ah! but then" George answered quickly, "Louisa, when a girl is choosing a man, she should look at his mother and see what she is like. You must remember that a man is generally a product of his mother's upbringing. As she is, as a woman--so will he be, as a man."

"I think you are all getting too profound down there in the shade, judging from the animated conversation," called William, who was nearing the group, having come to the end of the rows of potatoes. "What about some cool drinks all round, girls?"

"You work too hard on a hot day, Father," said Freddie, as the girls rose to go to the house, acting upon his suggestion.

"Well, my dear, if I don't do it now, the plants will suffer."

"But, Father, you've done more than your bit, now rely on your prayers as you tell us to do," said Laura.

"That is perfectly true in most instances, my dear, but in this case I like to think of that proverb, "Pray for a good garden, but keep on hoeing."

"Father believes that the Lord helps those who try to help themselves," said Charles.

"I heard the end of that the other day," remarked George, "But the Lord help those whom I find helping themselves to my things."

"That is really quite good, but I think we'll have to think of a nice toast when the girls bring that drink," laughed William, as he sat down on the ground beside Laura's low seat. Three girls brought a great jugful of lime juice, glasses and a large fruit cake.

Constance set the cake down beside her mother and said, "It is a long time before dinner, so I brought this along to keep us going."

They all spent an amusing half hour in thinking of toasts and capping each other's bright remarks and the time passed merrily.

"Much as I dislike breaking up this delightful party, I am afraid I must excuse myself and hurry the dinner along," and Laura put her knitting away into the little bag she always carried and rose to her feet.

Louisa and Freddie jumped up also, "Not you, dear," said Laura to Constance. "You must have a rest from preparing vegetables sometimes, so talk to the others. We'll get in each other's way if we all go."

Constance's unselfish soul demurred at that, but her sparkling eyes took in the brothers sitting there, whom she so seldom saw, so she sat down again to join in with the idle chatter.

Laura went away with the girls arms entwined round her. As they walked between the gay borders to the house Freddie asked, "Mum, do you remember the pupurangi shells that you used to get the Maori boys to bring from the bush? Mr Pope paid five shillings each, I remember."

"Yes," said Laura rather sadly, "I wish I had one now. I always loved those sweet pets. You know the times we put one down by the front gate, in the sweet william border, and it wandered right round the garden among the sweet william plants."

"It was fun when we were small," said Louisa, "We often amused ourselves tracking it down. Someone told me at the Cartwrights that the shells are found up on the slopes of the Southern Alps."

Laura was surprised, "I never heard that, but it was found in the bush in and around Otaua and Taheke. I know. Such a beautiful snail-like shell, the creature living inside wanders all day among the mosses and fallen leaves. Sometimes they found them up the trunks of the large trees. I always liked to have one among my sweet williams, I fancy they ate all the grubs and small insects they found."

"Mother," exclaimed Louisa, "While we are putting dinner on, couldn't you tell us some more about Grandfather's life? I was often sorry when away that we hadn't asked more about your early days."

Laura smiled at the two eager daughters who had always been anxious for her to tell a story. She began,

"It is so long since I talked about it, that I cannot remember where I left off. I think I told you that my Grandfather - C A B, we used to call him, sent Charles out to New Zealand, and he came out later. He had remained behind to fix up his affairs before leaving Plymouth perhaps, as he said when he farewelled Charles, forever. He seemed to have the wish to see his son firmly established in his new home, so after a party farewelling the saloon passengers in a nearby hotel, Charles sailed in the 'Amelia Thompson' in March, 1841. A small sailing ship which took about five months to reach New Plymouth, in Taranaki, New Zealand.

"C A B sailed in the 'Oriental' on June 22nd 1841, and was met by my Dad when he was taken off the vessel by a lighter in the open roadstead about three miles away from the little township of New Plymouth. He must have had his first shock at the lack of amenities in the new country when he was landed on the shore. He had thought, poor Grandfather, that he would be able to make a home in a new land, among other literary minded men like himself, but he met no one but artisans and people---beyond a scanty few educated men---who thought they had no use for education. No wonder he pined in the new bleak life. It must have been unbearably lonely for a man who was known, in the Old World, to be a polished writer and a brilliant conversationalist. He had been for so many years an intimate friend of Shelley, Lord Byron, Sir Charles Dilke, Lord Houghton and many other brilliant writers and artists. You know your father has many works on his shelves."

"You forget, Mother," objected Louisa, tidying up the workbench while Freddie took away the vegetable peelings and discarded leaves, "he had Grandfather Brown to talk and walk with all that time."

"My dear," said Laura, "my father was busy carving out a new niche for himself and was often, I suppose, too tired at night to spend the evening entertaining his father. Another thing, my Dad was never fond of overmuch walking so C A B must have been very solitary. He pined

away, and died from a stroke seven months after he landed."

Presently Laura resumed,

"People said C A B loved sitting on the top of Marsland Hill, gazing far out over the ocean. They buried him there, on the slope overlooking the church site. I used to feel sad whenever I walked that way. It seemed to me that the poor dear and lonely old gentleman was still gazing into the distance and I wondered what his thoughts were through those lonely months before he died."

"I remember once hearing Father say that Great-Grandfather Brown was a poet and a good artist so he had many accomplishments. No wonder he was admired by the gay Florentine ladies when he belonged to a gifted literary circle everywhere he went," observed Louisa.

"Your father was right. He had two brilliant unfinished works and many papers when he died. He also left many papers of Keats and some of his with his friend Moncton Milnes who was to re-arrange them and see to their publication. Somehow, that doesn't seem to have been done. My Dad, too, has many letters of Keats, Landor, Leigh, Hunt, and many others in his possession and papers of theirs also, which he has always told us are to be sent Home to be put among the collection of Keats' possessions which are being gathered together. He said they would be mentioned in his will, but everyone of us know that he meant them to go Home directly he died. That was always an understood thing."

Did Grandfather ever tell you about his grandparents?" asked Louisa.

"Yes, many things which I must tell you about one day. When his Grandmother was left a widow, she was very wealthy in landed property. From her relatives, she had received as legacies, all the land that is now made into Lambeth Walk, and Regent Street, with one hundred and thirty other house properties. He spent a holiday at her home just before he left England."

"It is fun getting dinner when we have you to tell us stories as you did long ago," said Freddie, as she flitted from pantry to the table, setting the long refectory table for dinner.

Louisa was rubbing up the silver, and filling the vases, while their mother sat on the window^{seat} and entertained them both. The saucepans were simmering gently on the stove and the ticking clock on the mantelpiece reminded them that the afternoon was passing.

"Look at Mother," exclaimed Louisa, as she paused for a moment, a bunch of beautiful miniature flowers - sunflowers in her hand. "Charles should be here, she cannot sit a moment without making her knitting needles work overtime."

Laura had paused, her face uplifted in surprise when first the laughing girl spoke, but hearing her needles mentioned she smiled and silently continued with her knitting.

After a few seconds, she said, her head bent over her work, "I like to have socks in reserve, Louisa. Then if I hear of a bazaar or someone getting over an illness, I have always something useful at those times."

"The unsung Saint of the family" said Freddie, as both girls looked lovingly at her. "Wherever I've been I have never seen anyone so systematically busy as you are, Mother. Think of the years we've missed you, and very sadly, too."

"Well, I must do something to justify my existence, dears. It is not as if I am able to do something spectacular. My work lies in the home and garden, so I like to make the most of my time. We have missed you all very much, too, but there is no putting the clock back that will prevent Time from still going ticking on."

That evening when it was too dark to remain outside and to avoid the mosquitoes that buzzed in the scented evening air, they all trooped into the sitting room. Freddie sat down at the piano and ran her fingers lightly up and down the keys.

"Do you remember, Mother," she said, "when I brought this piano home with me to the East Coast, after staying that year in New Plymouth with Aunt Mary, and at The Pines? I've wondered since why Grandpa was so firm about it leaving New Plymouth with me. Aunt Mary was hoping he would forget to send the men up to the house to pack it, as she said

Uncle would have to go to the expense of getting her another."

Her mother replied after an instant's thought. "Well, when your father and I left there to go North she and her husband said they would look after it until we sent for it. We left it behind because it was said the roads up North were almost non-existent."

"You didn't tell the child that the piano was a wedding present from your father," said William.

"No, I thought she knew, but anyway, that was why my father was determined it should come back to me. I was rather sorry at first, because Mary had looked after it for so long."

"Seventeen years, to be exact. She had a great deal of pleasure from playing it. As it was John was quite capable of buying one for her. His firm was a veritable gold mine, I have heard. But I thought we were to listen to a family sing-song, so come along, boys and girls. Stand round the piano, and your mother and I will be a very interested audience."

Charles said he would be conductor and they began singing all the old songs that they had loved in their childhood.

After a while Louisa played the accompaniments and George conducted. The younger ones had very sweet voices which delighted the elder sisters and brothers who had not heard them sing since they were wee children. They were made to sing duets and trios, and they had a delighted audience as the whole family were great music lovers.

When the lights finally went out and the household sank to rest with windows widely flung to the sweet scents of the dying evening the moon rose over the waters and shed the blessing of its silvery light over the trees and garden guarding the school buildings.

CHAPTER THIRTY

The last week of the time the young people had allotted to themselves, before they had to retrace their steps on their respective journeys back to their scattered destinations, was a very full and satisfying one for all concerned.

Charles and George had constituted themselves as Masters of Ceremony and the others all agreed to carry out their suggestions as to how they should spend the time that was left.

"We have three clear days," said Charles, "in which to plant our footsteps in the sands of this home. Tomorrow we will place ourselves at Father's disposal and do everything in the garden and school grounds that he wants cleared up and yet cannot do by himself. Saturday we shall devote to helping round the house. We'll chop as much wood as we can, and fill up the woodshed and help the girls with anything we can. In that way things will be easier for Mother and the younger ones when they take over again. Sunday we shall spend quietly and get ready for our departure on Monday."

They were sitting under the trees at the foot of the garden. It had been a perfect morning and the afternoon was drawing to a close. After the heat of the earlier part of the day a soft breeze was sweeping gently in from the ocean and the whole family had assembled for a rest and a picnic tea.

The two young men and their two sisters were to catch Monday's steamer for Auckland, so they were crossing by launch to the mainland earlier in the day. There they would spend a couple of hours in the pretty little town on the shore of the Bay of Plenty. Each time they had been back for short visits they had met some of the townspeople who were friends of their parents, so as George remarked, "We'll have to call and say farewell, after accepting their various invitations to sprints and bun-fights. Charles, you and Louisa can go to some places while Freddie and I call on other people. In that way, Mother Grundy will be satisfied that we have done the right thing, and we're sure to have a good afternoon tea somewhere before we go on board."

There was a general laugh at George's happy way of arranging the programme for Monday afternoon. William remarked, "That sounds as good an arrangement as any, otherwise you'd have to hang around the town until the boat sailed. As soon as you reach Auckland you'll separate, I suppose. It will be pleasant for you to be together on the sea-trip."

Louisa smiled at her father. "Charles will have time to see me off by the train to the Cartwrights, before he catches his own. Freddie and George will go out to Great South Road."

"No," said George hastily. "I'm not going there, although I'll put Freddie on her tram. I promised to stay near lower Queen Street with the Hibberds. He is going back with me to the Coast on the same boat."

They looked at Freddie as they had thought the two had arranged to stay with relatives, but she shook her head. "George is right. He will be almost on the spot for sailing and I have to catch the early train next morning so we wouldn't have much time to be together. It is rather annoying that one does not run on Monday for me."

After some further discussion the boys went for a bathe in the lagoon while the girls went inside to get the dinner ready. They had told Laura that she was to enjoy herself as she was not to set foot in the kitchen as they worked.

Laura had not raised any objections as she had her work-basket beside her on the lawn and she knew William needed a rest. He was stretched out in a Morris chair, while Laura sat on her low knitting chair.

After a silence William observed, "Well, my dear, I think this garden is as pretty as any we have had during our years of school teaching. Of course this doesn't lend itself so much to being beautified by trellises and flowering shrubs as the Otatau garden did, as it is a much wider piece of ground but it has certainly repaid us for the work we have put into it."

Laura smiled as she glanced up the wide slope with the gay flower beds and the path running up to the house, edged on each side by the fences by neat vegetable beds.

"We would not have dreamt of having vegetables against the fence, as you say, in any other garden, but with this one placed as it is, there would be no really large piece of ground anywhere else for the vegetables we need. I love this garden, don't you?"

William laughed, "Indeed, I think I have a great affection for it. Do you remember your despair when we entered the gate of the Awanui schoolhouse, and saw docks and every other imaginable weed staring us in the face?"

"Oh! That was a dreadful moment! But what a beautiful garden it was when we left. I often wonder what happens when the next teacher comes in. There are so many who hate to think of doing much work about the place."

"I did hear of one school we left, and where the garden had received many fine compliments from the local people. You'll know it. The incoming teacher took one look at it and said "'Too much work entailed here"' So he got a man to scythe everything flat and he put it all in lawn". William felt almost as indignant when he spoke as he had done when the story was first retailed to him by a neighbouring teacher.

"I do recall hearing about him, William. What a barbarian! You forget that he kept the lemon tree and one of two of the extra special fruit trees." answered Laura with a shudder as she thought of the treasured flowers they had left behind that time. "There were bulbs and Cannas and all kinds of Oriental flowers that we grew from the seed my Dad sent. He used to spend pounds each year in getting bulbs and seeds from the Old Country, not to mention America and Holland. These lovely flowers to be left to the ruthless hands of such Goth!"

William agreed with her. His innate politeness did not allow him to use any stronger expression. "That huge garden at The Pines must have cost him a small fortune," he said, "Those beds of magnificent annuals and shrubs of all kinds and colour. I felt sad when I thought that

the front drive was being destroyed, after his death. Those high Camellia trees bordering it, were a sight worth going miles to see. And the trees on which he had grafted Camellia buds covered with so many different coloured blossoms, they were really beautiful, just like rainbow trees."

"If I began to think of the many choice plants in that garden it would almost break the part of my heart devoted to gardens," cried Laura. "He had so many one never saw anywhere else. It was a craze he had, as a younger man."

"Well, his vegetable garden was just as remarkable. I used to enjoy tramping up and down the paths with the Major, and I fancy that it was from some of those chats that we had around the guava bushes that I understood what pleasure a man could get from working and walking in his own garden. I did a little at Ratanui and gardened at these earlier homes, but the gardens were already there. It was not the same thing as starting from scratch."

Laura looked surprised but presently laughed as she said, "Do you know, William, I believe you have something there. I never really loved those earlier gardens. I suppose because they had been laid out by someone else, and we just carried on from where they had left off. One has to begin the garden and the love for it grows with the work of making a scene of beauty out of a scrap heap. But here come the boys! We'll soon be called inside."

The girls had certainly excelled themselves. The family sat down to a table groaning with many fancy little savouries, as well as a big roast of beef and Yorkshire pudding, with attendant vegetables.

"How do you manage to do all this, girls," asked Charles, as they took their accustomed places at the table. "Where did you learn to cook so well?"

"You'll soon be almost as good a cook as Mother is," exclaimed George, as he smiled broadly at the girls.

"There's a compliment that does not often come your way," said William, picking up the carvers. "You should rise and bow!"

The girls joined in with the merry peals of laughter as they rose one after the other and bowed to George.

"Mrs Cartwright and I take turns in being cook when Eliza has her day off," explained Louisa, "It is really great fun. When it is her turn she always tries to do something new so I also try to have a new dish when my turn comes."

"How does poor Cartwright manage to survive after having so many experiments tried out on him?" asked William.

"He says he has never been so well in his life. So that is a feather in our caps," replied Louisa.

"I am sure I wouldn't mind having you for my cook for some months," exclaimed Charles. "This is really excellent."

The two other boys added their notes of praise so the girls felt very pleased after their work. They had really taken great pains with the menu and it was greatly appreciated.

They would not allow their mother to help after dinner, so she and the others sat around the refectory table and chatted. William and Charles withdrew to the sittingroom to play chess in peace and quietness and Laura enjoyed a book while the others played five hundred.

The next morning everyone was astir early. At breakfast, when William said grace, "For what we are about to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful, Amen!" and everyone began their porridge, Laura said, "William, now that we are all together I must tell you a happy little tale that I have never forgotten. One of the younger boys when you were away from home once, said as we sat down at the table, 'Mum, may I say Grace?' and on my nodding in reply, he said, 'Bow your heads, girls, waddle about, waddle about, waddle about, Amen'. The little boy was not of school age and had never been able to follow your quick manner of speaking-----so did as he thought you did."

William stared at the tablecloth for a moment and then gave a shout of laughter. "I feel deeply ashamed of myself, if that was what it sounded like in his little ears."

After breakfast the boys went out with their parents and found many things that they could do to save work in the future. They also cleaned up the woodshed and put extra shelves in the wash-house-cum-workshop.

Untidy boughs were lopped from the trees under which they had spent many happy hours and damaged palings were replaced and all left shipshape.

Meanwhile the girls had been busy with brush and varnish tin and many articles of furniture were put out to dry, in the sunshine. They took down curtains and washed cushion covers. When Laura protested, the girls told her that they knew that she always did them all before the holidays ended and she could now - sit back and take things more easily."

"You won't have to think about them now, until Easter," said Freddie, as she heated the sad-irons on the stove and prepared to do the ironing. "We knew you would do them before school began, so now they will save you and the young ones the work as they will be all fresh again."

Louisa and Constance put the furniture back as it dried and both looked proudly at their work as they straightened their tired backs.

"This will save a great deal of polishing and you and Mother will not be so busy for a while," observed Louisa.

The younger children played happily under the trees and up and down the deserted playground.

During the afternoon the boys went to the lagoon to fish while the girls did part of their packing to save later trouble. They did what they could towards their brothers' packing and saw that everything was ready for the next day. As they worked they sang their old and well-loved songs, and felt quite sad at the thought that they would soon be separated by many miles from each other.

After dinner they sat talking under the trees until they were driven in by the mosquitoes which seemed to thrive just off the water's edge.

The garden was a mass of flowers and the sweet scented blossoms filled the air with a tender, haunting fragrance. Before they went inside they wandered up and down the paths admiring the garden in the soft twilight.

"The only garden that ever approached yours in fragrance was, to me, the one of Grannie Brown's in 27 Great South Road. Like yours, as soon as you enter the gate the same old-fashioned garden fragrance seems to surround you with a feeling that you have wandered into Fairyland by mistake," said Charles, as he wandered beside his mother.

The girls agreed with him and Louisa said she had often thought so. She thought it was because both gardens were always filled with old-fashioned flowers in every nook and corner. Freddie and George both declared that their mother's garden with the new and old favourites would be unbeaten anywhere.

"In fact," said George seriously, "If I found work near a garden like yours I'd want to live there for the rest of my days. Cross my heart, as we used to say."

Charles commented upon the fact that their mother's garden, wherever it was, invariably had a bul-bul (puru-puru) tree growing in a prominent position.

"Uncle Edward once told me," said George, "that he thought it resembled a shrub in the Indian jungle which he had heard the Indian peasants call the 'buhl-buhl' --- and he thought ours must belong to the same species."

"It is such an attractive tree, with its lovely red berries, and I always feel happier when one grows in the garden. I never plant it, the seed must be dropped by a bird but I should be very upset if it never grew here."

Laura was pleased and touched by their fond remarks. She and William had brought the family up very strictly in their very early years.

They allowed no slackness when they told them what to do. Each child knew that obedience was the first requisite and the youngsters wasted no time in carrying out orders. By the time they went to school they were already trained in obedience and in gentle manners and after that, it was only a case of kind and wise guidance until they thought things out for themselves. With prayerful hearts Laura and William had seen each one off when beginning an independent life, and they were always happy to see the delight the young people showed when they returned for a holiday. It had been the same when they gathered at home a few weeks before, and now they all felt the sadness of their impending departure.

The days had flown by on silken wings and as the last few days arrived each one had wished the clock could be put back. Even the youngest child in the home seemed to understand that they may never again gather together under the home roof.

As William prepared for his night's rest he was in a very quiet and thoughtful mood. He said earnestly, "You know, my dear, it has been marvellous to be all together again. They may never again manage to get their holidays at the same time and no one knows where future paths may lead each one. I have tried to get the utmost pleasure from every moment of their stay."

"I have felt the same way," replied Laura, "When they all wrote to say they would all be here together I felt so thankful. It seemed as though God smiled on our home. I couldn't lose that feeling and it has made me feel very humble and grateful. They are so affectionate and thoughtful that I am proud each time they call me 'Mother'."

William smiled affectionately at her, "I have felt the same way, my love. Grateful that we all are under the home roof again and humble because of the great affection they so readily show in every way."

He did not add that he had attempted to say the same sort of thing to Charles and George one evening and that they had surprised and pleased him by saying that they had all looked upon their early home training as the safeguard they clung to when they found so often a disregard for the ties of home. They had been shocked at the lack of family loyalties they had met with, wherever they went.

Charles had said, "I was, at first greatly surprised to see the light way in which many people treat their Sundays. Many seem to attend no place of worship at all, while others attend because of the feeling of respectability it gives them to be seen and known as constant churchgoers. Young fellows have told me that in their early life obedience was treated as a joke, and their parents liked them to choose their own playmates and go where they wished. We can always tell in the schools what a pupil's home environment is like. Our most difficult pupils, and showing least home training, are more often not from poor homes. As a rule, they come from well-to-do homes where they are thoroughly spoilt from childhood. Very often the children from less well-endowed homes are very carefully trained. It is a very difficult question and older men say that each year will bring more difficulties."

Putting out the light and drawing up the blind of the side windows, he stood looking out at the shadowy garden.

"You know, Laura," he said thoughtfully, "I was thankful in my young manhood to have belonged to a line of Godfearing forbears. I still believe that a Christian home is a very precious possession. No matter what sin exists in the world the influence from such a home steals out to counteract it, and spreads its gentle goodness far and wide."

"That is so, William" replied Laura in the same quiet tone, "I remember the colourful years when the children were small and the days often difficult, we often seemed to see a Light shining far, far away. Dear old Archdeacon Govett used to say that no prayer falls unheeded, and that our forefathers' prayers still influence the lives of unborn generations."

There was a long silence. Then William turned to say, "It is a

wonderful thought. As our lives have been helped by the prayers of our ancient fathers so may our prayers help our descendants while we wait for them to join us, later, in the Home Eternal. Time is passing now, all too quickly---and there is so much one would like to do that will never get done. The days are so short, and I have much I would wish to do before the last goodnight bell sounds and Time and I part."

"The last Time," murmured Laura, "It should be a frightening thought---but if we are together, it will just be like the pushing aside of a curtain to enter into a new life."

This scan of a photocopy of a duplicated copy of the typewritten text
as well as preparation of the *Extract from the Tobin family tree* made
in July 2019 by William John Tobin (b. 1953 ; grandson of Charles
Edward O'Hara Tobin)